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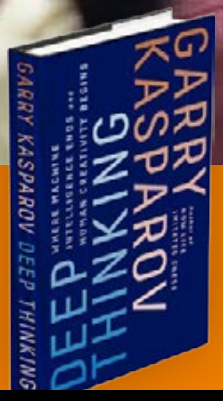


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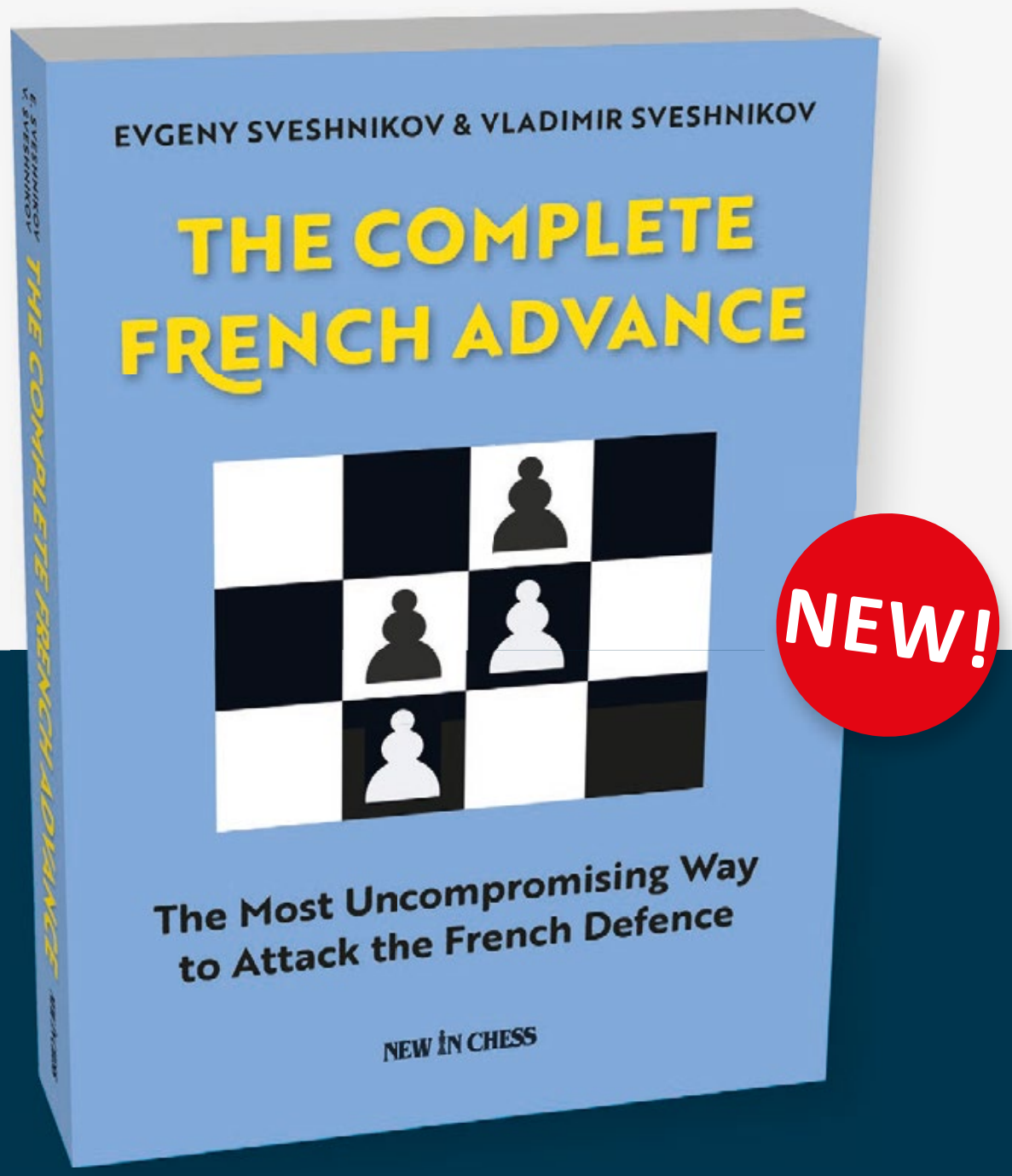
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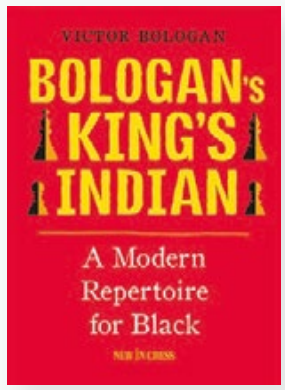


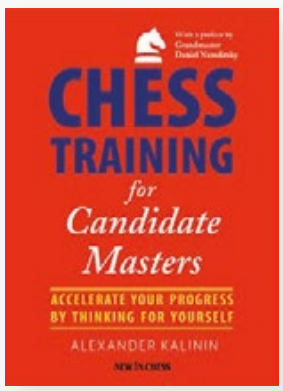


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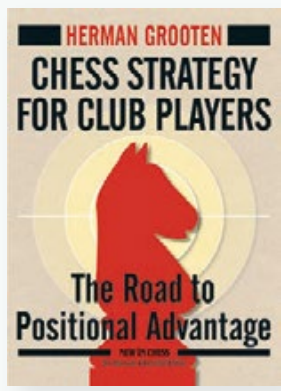


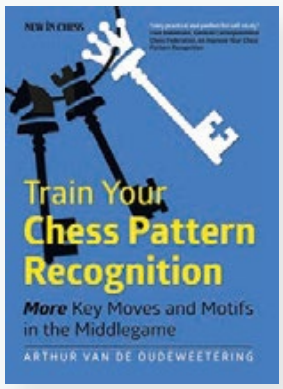


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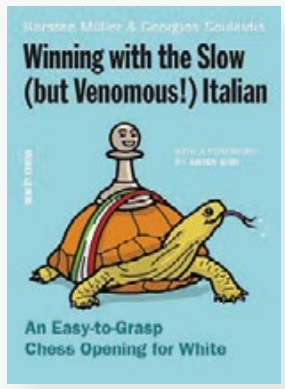


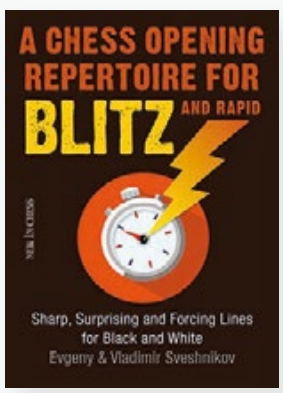
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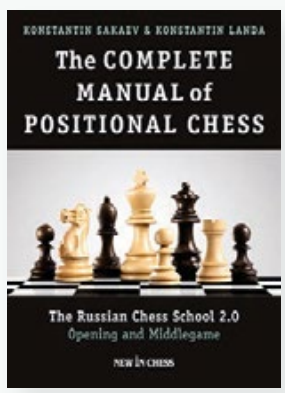
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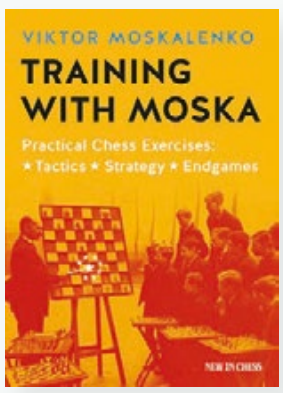


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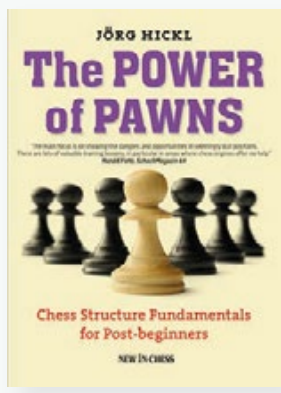


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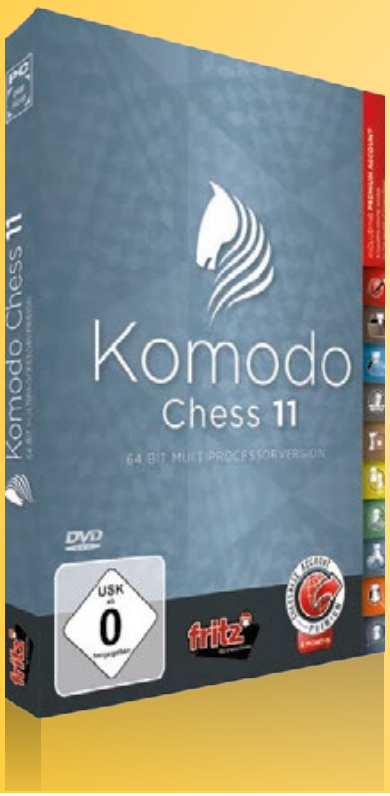


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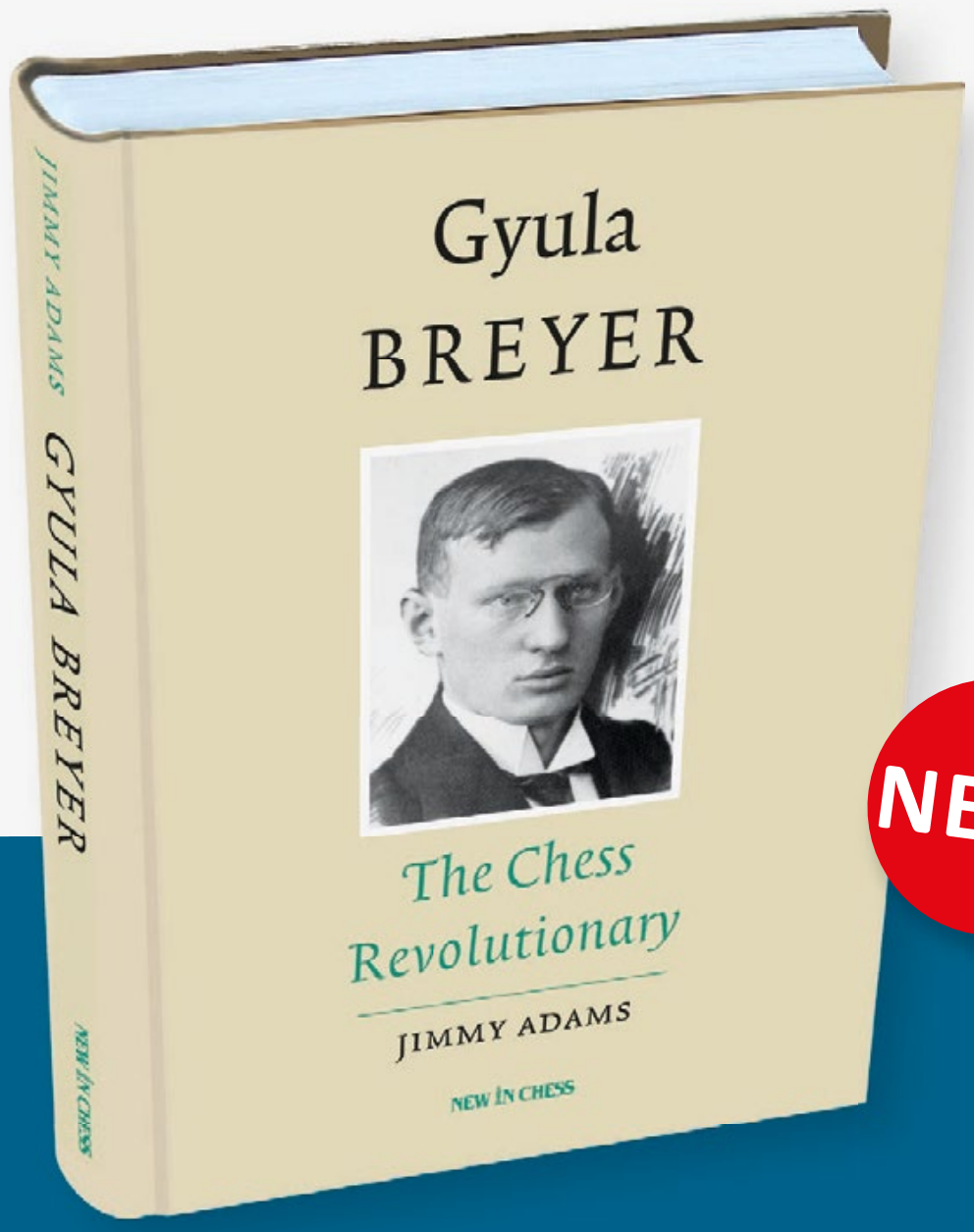


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Gyula Breyer (1893-1921) promoted the idea of dynamic chess and formulated many of the Hypermodern concepts, long before others started their investigations. Yet, after his death, he was omitted from most of the chess history books and today is only known for the Breyer Variation in the Ruy Lopez.

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# Contents

'Many chess players are unusually superstitious and quite stubborn.'

**8 Smart bear**
An amazing, chess-loving pet.

**10 NIC's Café**
Conor McGregor, another boxer that loves our game, and scantily-clad ladies (playing chess) that got a Tory MP in trouble.

**13 Your Move**
The World Champion's manners. And a letter from Prague by David Navara.

**14 The strongest tournament ever**
How high does Altibox Norway Chess 2017 reach on the list?

**15 Fair & Square**
Does Madeleine Albright agree that international relations is like a game of chess?

**16 Clash of the titans**
Norway Chess celebrated five years of top-flight chess in Stavanger with a stunning line-up replete with today's stars. Levon Aronian stole the World Champion's limelight when he defeated him in a game for the ages to claim one of his finest victories.

**23 Celeb64: Heath Ledger**

**34 Interview: Levon Aronian**
A lively, at times philosophical talk about Magnus, Tal, Bruckner, Yerevan, San Sebastian and the other good things in life.

**40 Judit Polgar's column**
On Peter Leko, a most reliable force on the first board of the Hungarian team.

**44 Deep thinking?**
Jonathan Rowson wrote an enthralling review of Garry Kasparov's masterful new book on his matches against the computer and the future of AI.

**50 Grand Chess Tour de France**
Magnus Carlsen won the first leg of the GCT, but the World Champion needed a tiebreak after local hero Maxime Vachier-Lagrave went on the rampage in the blitz.

**62 Maximize Your Tactics**
Find the right moves.

**64 Short Stories**
Nigel Short visited the Cayman Islands, where a fine chess seed seems to have fallen on fertile soil.

**66 Magnus reloaded**
Hot on the heels of his Paris triumph, the World Champion also claimed the Your Next Move leg of the GCT in Leuven.

**80 SOS: the Simple Scotch**
An effective weapon against a venerable opening.

**84 China wins World Teams**
Without losing a single game, China defended their title in Khanty-Mansiysk. A report by the one and only Adhiban Baskaran.

**94 Chess Pattern Recognition**
Silently sacking the exchange.

**96 Sadler on Books**
'What makes a really good book?'

**100 Matlakov European Champion**
Jan Timman takes a look at the top-finishers in Minsk.

**106 Just Checking**
What is Vidit Gujrathi's greatest fear?

**CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE**
Erwin l'Ami, Levon Aronian, Adhiban Baskaran, Jeroen Bosch, Fabiano Caruana, Li Chao, Anish Giri, Vidit Gujrathi, John Henderson, Dylan McClain, Peter Heine Nielsen, Maxim Notkin, Arthur van de Oudeweetering, Yannick Pelletier, Judit Polgar, Jonathan Rowson, Matthew Sadler, Nigel Short, Wesley So, Jan Timman, Maxime Vachier-Lagrave

SUBSCRIPTIONS: p. 102 COLOPHON: p. 13

# Smarter than the average bear

Meet Stephan the 300lb grizzly bear who, when you bring out a chess set in his company, likes nothing more than to rush over and sit down beside you as if he wants to challenge you to a game!

Stephan was adopted as a 3-month-old orphaned cub by Moscow couple Svetlana and Yuriy Panteleenko, after his mother was shot by hunters and he was found alone and in a bad way near their dacha. They cared for him, and he became so used to human company that they took him in. Now, 24 years old, he gets through 25kg of fish, vegetables and eggs every day.

He's become a big part of the Panteleenko family, and they noticed that whenever they brought out a chess set or a book, he would come and nuzzle up to them almost as if wanting to also play or perhaps read. He would even happily pose for a smartphone selfie.

One such image caught the eye of the young Russian photographer Natalia Grebesheva, who has been working on a series of interesting human/wildlife portraits with her wife and model, Victoria Fadina - the pick of the series proved to be the two instantly hitting it off over a game of chess. ■

NATALIA GREBESHEVA

# NIC's Café

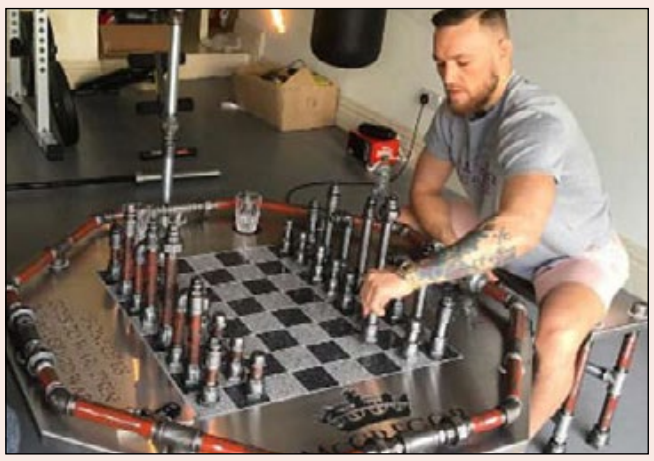
## Fighting chess

Just what is it with chess that attracts our game to boxers? Lennox Lewis, the Klitschko brothers, Manny Pacquiao, they all love to play chess, believing it to boost their ring strategy. Now the latest pugilist to take to the 64 squares is the legendary cage-fighter Conor McGregor.

UFC star McGregor is due to make his professional debut in the boxing ring with his eagerly-anticipated, multi-million dollar showdown with Floyd Mayweather in Las Vegas in late August.

In the lead-up to the fight, the big Irishman posted pictures on Instagram from his training camp showing he was using chess – with an outlandish chess table and oversized pieces that looked more like a prop from the set of Game of Thrones! – to plot his strategy for what many pundits perceive to be a mismatch against the 49-0 undefeated boxer.

'Chess is a great game,' explained McGregor as he posted the photo that attracted more than 350,000 'likes' on the social media platform within a matter of hours. But there was a further chessic twist, as both faced each other in Brooklyn, NY, in the final of what's become a series of fiery and often bizarre promotional



**We can see why Conor McGregor thinks 'chess is a great game'.**

press conferences ahead of their Las Vegas showdown. 'Now it's time for me to control the chess board,' Mayweather(!) said. 'I'm no longer on the chess board, I control the chess board.'

## I'm Spartacus

At the height of the Soviet dominance of chess, the USSR team championship was one of the most demanding and strongest team events outside of the Chess Olympiad. It was part of a massive multi-sports festival called the 'Spartakiad' – a name that

**Mind you, what you see here is only one move of a game of Combat Chess!**

was indeed derived from Spartacus, the Thracian gladiator who became the legendary slave rebel leader.

Interestingly, now a new chess fantasy/variant is taking off in the American Midwest that even Spartacus might well have fancied his chances in. It's called 'Human Combat Chess', and was created eight years ago by Mike Lubke. This summer several public show bouts will be produced by Minneapolis company Six Elements Theatre.

Basically, Human Combat Chess is a sport where chess is played with armed performers rather than tiny chess pieces, and they get to use stage weapons chosen from armouries with implements including quarterstaffs, longswords, nunchaku, and just about anything else a medieval warrior might conceivably want to go into battle with.

The rules are that two teams of 32 fighters face off on a giant board, each player representing a chess piece. Each side's king calls out the moves, and pieces have to go where their kings send them. When a piece moves to attack another, it's not an automatic capture as on a traditional chess board: the pieces need to – gladiatorial-style – fight it out for possession of the disputed square.

The board then clears and the aggressor selects the weapons the match will be fought for. There then follows much clanging of swords, swinging of staffs, slashing daggers or a flurry of feet and fists – and all choreographed by professional fight directors with experience in Renaissance Festival jousting and Battle Re-enactments.

Human Combat Chess has now even established its own Midwest Combat Chess League – and it could well take off, as there's reports of several kick-start projects looking to fund its growth across America, with an inaugural bout already financed and set for Chicago also in the late summer.

## Give Peace Chess a chance

From a gladiatorial variant we now segue to a more peaceful variant, as we head to the City of Peace and Justice, commonly known in the Netherlands as The Hague, as local artist Felix Albers has created 'embracing' chess pieces for a game that embodies friendship, peace, and collaboration.

The unique interlocking curved design of Albers' 'Paco Šako' – which means Peace Chess – pieces, mean that the black and white chess pieces can form physical unions on the board. But there's a twist, as this feature adds a whole new dimension and level of ingenuity to our game, by introducing four new moves central to what the artist calls his 'Paco Šako experience.'

The main rule changes involve 'Creating a union', 'Moving a union', 'Taking over a union' and 'Chain Reaction' – each involving pieces not being taken off the board when

captured, but in fact joined in harmony to the opposing piece, and then some delicate nuances on how the pieces then move and the game continues, and all of this is best explained by going to the official website at pacosako.com.

The Dutch artist says he was inspired to create the new variant to teach his young son 'not only the great game of chess, but also give a kind, mindful and philosophical meaning to chess, with the aim of teaching (him) something essential about life, working together, merging strengths and finding harmony in a world with too much conflict and misunderstanding.'

With all that peace, harmony and friendship in mind, we're wondering

**How peaceful. Paco Šako pawns of different colour say hello and embrace.**

if perhaps we could find someone to arrange a Paco Šako match-up anytime soon between Donald J. Trump and Kim Jong-un.

## Showing the Showgirls

The recent UK election didn't go at all well for the Conservatives, who were banking on a landslide victory to bolster

**Who wouldn't study this photo and try to see who is better?**

their Brexit hand and it all backfired when they unexpectedly lost their majority and instead had to form a minority government. Things went from bad to worse thereafter for Tory MP Jonathan Djanogly, who, according to various reports in the press, was somewhat hopeful he would once again become a government minister.

But his hopes were dashed when he was hugely embarrassed after being discovered 'deeply studying' a saucy photo of scantily-clad women on his smartphone in the House of Commons on the first day back after that fateful election. One of his colleagues tweeted a picture from behind Djanogly in the chamber, and caught him out, and the story and picture soon went viral across the UK media.

But let's at the very least be fair to the hapless Djanogly. He was looking at the 1958 picture Showgirls Play Chess Backstage at the Latin Quarter Nightclub – taken by Gordon Parks, a great African-American photographer, writer and film-maker – and was perhaps patriotically reminding himself of the theory on the English Opening!

## Red Red Wine

A popular summer tournament destination can be found in north Bordeaux, in the south-west of France, with the annual Naujac sur Mer, Open des Vins seeing the winner taking home what potentially could be a liver-damaging first prize of their body weight in wine. And we only mention this because we'd like to put this idea into the head of one of the region's new vineyard owners with impeccable chess connections.

It's none other than Andrei Filatov, the Russian Chess Federation head honcho and FIDE vice-President. The oligarch and philanthropist has sponsored many chess events over the years, combining our game with culture, in conjunction with his Russian Art Foundation. Just think of the Chess in the Museum tournaments that started off with the Anand-Gelfand World Championship match in Moscow's world-famous Tretyakov Gallery in 2012. And news now came to us of an added cultural link-up that involves another of our favourite pastimes of drinking a good Bordeaux red wine.

In 2014, Filatov acquired the Grace God Priori, Saint-Emilion vineyard and winery. Through his Russian Art Foundation, he is also the head of a very rich collection of Russian paintings of the twentieth century – so looking to further promote Russian culture in Europe, he's now adorning all the bottles in his new winery with

**Saint-Émilion Grand Cru, art and chess, a happy marriage.**

miniature works by famous artists of his country in his collection, such as Viktor Vasnetsov, Ilya Repin and Nicolai Fechin. ■

# McFarland

"[The] classic McFarland book: a deeply researched, lovingly produced and definitive enquiry into an area of chess with a view to being the last word on the subject"—*British Chess Magazine*

**W.H.K. Pollock.** ***A Chess Biography with 524 Games.*** Olimpiu G. Urcan *and* John S. Hilbert. 2017, $65 library binding (18.4 × 26 cm), 508pp., 68 photographs, diagrams, tables, appendices, notes, bibliography, index, 978-0-7864-5868-4. Englishman Pollock (1859–1896) played in many important American events of the 1800s and numerous matches against strong players.

**H.E. Bird.** ***A Chess Biography with 1,198 Games.*** Hans Renette. 2016, $75 library binding (21.9 × 28.5 cm), 608pp., 1,198 games, 376 diagrams, 85 photographs, tables, appendices, notes, bibliography, indexes, 978-0-7864-7578-0. No 19th century player had a longer career — nor more slashing attack games— than Henry Edward Bird (1829–1908). A detailed account of his personal life and vigorous feats.

*Go For It!* 30" × 30" oil on linen, Louis Munroe 2016 (dwaynesueno@gmail.com)

**Joseph Henry Blackburne.** ***A Chess Biography.*** Tim Harding. 2015, $75 library binding (21.9 × 28.5 cm), 592pp., 1,186 games, 95 illustrations, appendices, notes, bibliography, indexes, 978-0-7864-7473-8. "Comprehensive...beautiful"—*Huffington Post*; "a great love for detail...a breathtaking and carefully researched masterpiece"—*Chess News;* "definitive...indispensable"—*Chess Life*.

**Mikhail Botvinnik.** ***The Life and Games of a World Chess Champion.*** Andrew Soltis. 2014, $49.95 library binding (18.4 × 26 cm), 282pp., 107 annotated games, 127 diagrams, photographs, notes, bibliography, indexes, 978-0-7864-7337-3. "Brilliant...the best book on Botvinnik by far"—*Chess News* "another Soltis tour-de-force...a fascinating book"— IM John Donaldson (*JeremySilman.com)*; Book of the Year— English Chess Federation. Best Book of the Year—*Chess Journalists of America.*

**Vera Menchik.** ***A Biography of the First Women's World Chess Champion, with 350 Games.*** Robert B. Tanner. 2016, $49.95 library binding (18.4 × 26 cm), 328pp., 21 photographs, appendices, bibliography, indexes, 978-0-7864-9602-0. The first woman to compete on an equal basis with the top male players. She dominated women's chess for 17 years. Games include notes by her, Capablanca, Alekhine, Fine, others.

**José Raúl Capablanca.** ***A Chess Biography.*** Miguel A. Sánchez. 2015, $55 library binding (18.4 × 26 cm), 563pp., 195 annotated games, 55 photographs, appendices, notes, bibliography, indexes, 978-0-7864-7004-4. "Amazing"—*Huffington Post;* "even the most ardent Capa fan will learn something new...very readable"—*Chess Life*; "a luxurious work and a true labor of love"—*Chess News*; "first rate...highly recommended"—IM John Donaldson (*JeremySilman.com*).

**Samuel Lipschütz.** ***A Life in Chess.*** Stephen Davies. 2015, $65 library binding (18.4 × 26 cm), 408pp., 249 games, 42 illustrations, appendices, bibliography, indexes, 978-0-7864-9596-2. "Valuable collectors' item... beautifully printed...history at its best"—*British Chess Magazine*; "a great discovery"—*Huffington Post*; "highly recommended"— IM John Donaldson (*JeremySilman.com*).

**Ignaz Kolisch.** ***The Life and Chess Career.*** Fabrizio Zavatarelli. 2015, $75 library binding (21.9 × 28.5 cm), 360pp., 324 games, 174 diagrams, 63 illustrations, appendices, notes, bibliography, indexes, 978-0-7864-9690-7. The Hungarian (1837–1889) champion and financier. "One of the most accurate chess books that McFarland has ever published"—Edward Winter, *Chess Notes*; "remarkable"—*Huffington Post*.

## In Production

**A World of Chess.** ***Its Development and Variations through Centuries and Civilizations.*** Jean-Louis Cazaux *and* Rick Knowlton. 2017, 49.95 softcover (17.8 × 25.4 cm), ca. 450pp., ca. 71 photos, 297 diagrams, 9 maps, notes, bibliography, indexes, 978-0-7864-9427-9. Immense, deeply researched: the Persian and Arab game familiar for 500 years; similar games going back 1500 years still played; evolution of strategic board games especially in India, China and Japan; more recent chess variants (board sizes, new pieces, 3-D etc.).

"Very interesting studies...McFarland puts out more scholarly chess books than any other"—*Chess Life*

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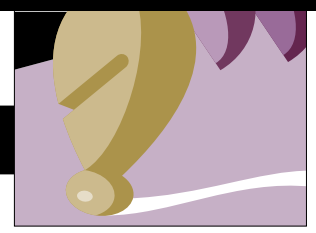

## The rematch clause

In Nigel Short's column in New In Chess 2017/4, he claims (quoting Jonathan Mestel) that, when a World Championship rematch clause is in effect (as it was during the 1950s when Botvinnik held the title), the incumbent has a 75% chance of retaining his title. I had my doubts about this estimate and discussed it with a friend who has a better grasp of probability than I do.

There are two basic models: (1) A given match has only two outcomes: Player A has the title after the match, or player B does – and both outcomes are equally likely. This must be the model Mestel used, but I believe it to be incorrect, because the two outcomes are not equally likely, as the incumbent has draw odds. So I think we need to use a model with three outcomes: (2) A given match can result in either a win for player A, a draw, or a win for player B. If the players are of equal strength, I consider all three to be equally likely.

Model #2 breaks down as follows:

The incumbent wins the original match and retains his title (probability 1/3 or 33%).

The incumbent draws the original match and retains his title (probability 1/3 or 33%).

The incumbent loses the original match and loses his title (probability 1/3 or 33%).

The original incumbent wins the rematch and regains his title (probability 1/9 or 11%).

The original incumbent draws the rematch and fails to regain his title (probability 1/9 or 11%).

The original incumbent loses the rematch and fails to regain his title (probability 1/9 or 11%).

The probability of the original incumbent ending up with the title is therefore 1/3 + 1/3 + 1/9 = 7/9 or approximately 77.8%. This is close to 75%, but actually a bit better. So the incumbent's odds are even better than Mestel's claim!

If the three outcomes are not equally likely (historically, significantly less than 1/3 of World Championship matches have been drawn), then it's hard to do a neat calculation as above, and we probably won't get a nice fraction like ¾ or 7/9. However, as the probability of a drawn match approaches 0, the probability of the incumbent retaining his title approaches 75%. So I guess it's not a bad estimate in any event.

Dennis J. Kosterman
Madison, Wisconsin, USA

## A matter of manners

This is not related to a recent article in your formidable magazine, but I cannot get rid of that feeling that some of today's best chess players lack some very basic social skills. And those are foremost respect and courtesy. I especially get this impression seeing the current World Champion Mr. Magnus Carlsen behave in interviews. And it is in such obvious contrast to other top players like for instance Mr. Levon Aronian or Mr. Wesley So.

Sure, chessplayers, and even more so at the very top, need to have strong egos and be singular characters. However, the arrogance which is invariably felt in many of Mr. Carlsen's comments to (mostly Grandmaster!) commentators, is, at least for my feeling, detrimental to the general culture of chess.

Take, for instance, the reaction to Maurice Ashley's questions during Day 3 of the Paris Grand Chess Tour, Geeez, where are your manners, Mr. Carlsen? Maurice may have used some words that were not completely suitable for the moment, but come on, are we in high school here, being offended if we are not praised in the highest tones? Are you a professional or are you a spoilt teenager?

Yes sure, you are the best, but being particularly good at one thing, doesn't make you a superior human being, showing disrespect to other professionals. Modesty and humility, I miss them deeply in the western world of competitive chess. Sure, a win is a win, but no, I don't subscribe to that school of thought which says 'nothing else matters'. It very much does.

P. Benscheid
Cologne, Germany

## Chess and sleep

I have just read the article by Mrs. Vallens on chess and sleep in New In Chess 2017/4. It seems that I found a minor mistake in it: 'We all have this afternoon dip in our physiology that causes midday drowsiness, diminishing our reaction time, memory, coordination, mood and alertness.'

I suppose this sentence was written in the early afternoon, as actually the reaction time should rather increase. Anyway, the article was quite interesting!

David Navara
Prague, Czech Republic

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INFOGRAPHIC

# The Strongest Tournaments of All Time

The Altibox Norway Chess tournament won by Levon Aronian was very strong, as all 10 players were ranked in the top 12 in the world. Was it the strongest tournament in history? The answer to that question turns out to be a bit tricky.

The most direct method is to calculate the average rating of the players, but that measure has some problems. One is that there has been rating inflation in recent years, so comparing tournaments from different eras is not really possible. A second problem is that official ratings have only existed since 1970, so tournaments from earlier eras lack that metric.

Jeff Sonas of Chessmetrics has tried to solve that issue by going back and rating all players from the last 200 years. But that is still an imperfect system.

In 2009, Sonas suggested a different way to measure the strongest tournaments would be to look only at the rankings of all the players, using the Chessmetrics rating system. The strongest tournaments would be the ones with the most elite players.

He further refined this by weighting the elite players in the calculation. So a tournament that had the top eight players in the world in a field of 10 would be closer to an ideal elite score than a 10-player tournament that had the players ranked Nos. 3 to 10, but lacked the top two players.

Sonas found that there has only been one perfectly elite tournament: AVRO 1938, because the eight players in the tournament were the top eight in the world. Las Palmas 1996 came close, but its six players were ranked Nos. 1 to 5 and No. 7.

According to Sonas's system, Norway 2017 was an extraordinarily elite tournament: It is tied for the fourth best score ever, as can be seen in the following graphic. One thing that stands out is how many of the top tournaments have been played in the last seven years: Three of the top 10 and eight of the top 20 (all noted in darker orange ■).

*DYLAN LOEB McCLAIN*

| **Strongest tournaments, based on percentage of elite players** | Numer of players | World ranking of players | **Percentage of top players** | Winner(s) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| AVRO 1938 | 8 | 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 | 100 | Paul Keres / Reuben Fine |
| Las Palmas 1996 | 6 | 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7 | 99 | Garry Kasparov |
| Sinquefield Cup 2015 | 10 | 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 24 | 97 | Levon Aronian |
| Norway Chess 2017 | 10 | 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12 | 96 | Levon Aronian |
| Linares 1998 | 7 | 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10 | 96 | Viswanathan Anand |
| Linares 1993 | 14 | 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 15, 17, 19, 56 | 96 | Garry Kasparov |
| Reggio Emilia 1991 | 10 | 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 11, 12, 15 | 95 | Viswanathan Anand |
| Linares 1999 | 8 | 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 17 | 95 | Garry Kasparov |
| Linares 2000 | 6 | 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 29 | 95 | Garry Kasparov / Vladimir Kramnik |
| Sinquefield Cup 2014 | 6 | 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 9 | 93 | Fabiano Caruana |
| Linares 1992 | 14 | 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 15, 17, 22, 43, 94 | 93 | Garry Kasparov |
| Norway Chess 2015 | 10 | 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 28, 61 | 92 | Veselin Topalov |
| Baden-Baden 1870 | 10 | 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, unr. | 92 | Adolf Anderssen |
| Tal Memorial 2011 | 10 | 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 20 | 91 | Magnus Carlsen / Levon Aronian |
| Zurich Chess Challenge 2014 | 6 | 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 9 | 91 | Magnus Carlsen |
| London Chess Classic 2015 | 10 | 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 17, 20 | 91 | Magnus Carlsen |
| London 1883 | 14 | 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 12, 15, 21, 25, unr., unr. | 91 | Johannes Zukertort |
| Nottingham 1936 | 15 | 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 50, 92, 97, 110, 130 | 90 | Mikhail Botvinnik / José Raúl Capablanca |
| Linares 1994 | 14 | 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 14, 24, 39, 53, 56 | 90 | Anatoly Karpov |
| Tal Memorial 2012 | 10 | 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 15, 39 | 89 | Magnus Carlsen |

*Kasparov won or tied for first in five of the 11 strongest tournaments.*

*Aronian has won two of the six strongest tournaments.*

*Karpov's victory in Linares 1994, in which he scored 11 points out of 13, is still considered one of the greatest performances ever.*

# Fair & Square

**Jimmy Page**: 'Jack White is an extraordinary person because he's like a three-dimensional chess player. He thinks so far ahead.'
*(The rock guitarist and founder of Led Zeppelin)*

**Jeff Nichols**: 'My characters aren't chess pieces. I don't move them around some big board. I actually care about these fictitious people.'
*(The Palme d'Or-winning American film director and screenwriter)*

**Russell Crowe**: 'I don't play chess with my life, ya' know.'

**Forest Whitaker**: 'I love to play chess. The last time I was playing, I started to really see the board. I don't mean just seeing a few moves ahead – something else. My game started getting better. It's the patterns. The patterns are universal.'
*(The Oscar-winning actor famous for leading roles in Hollywood movies Bird, Platoon and The Last King of Scotland)*

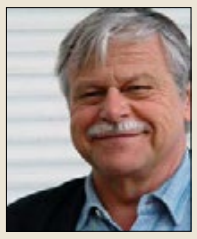
**Commander Sarah West**: 'Anti-submarine warfare is the military version of chess. You must work out what the enemy is going to do before they even think of it.'
*(The first woman in history to take charge of a Royal Navy warship)*

**Annika Hagley**: 'Trump's political demeanour is one of a chess neophyte whose only strategy is the King's Gambit. It accounts for the chaos of his administration, the failure to bring together Congress in the numbers and spirit necessary to enact his agenda.'
*(The US academic and political writer, in her opinion piece for Newsweek magazine, that used several chess analogies to describe the chaos swirling inside Donald J. Trump's White House)*

**Madeleine Albright**: 'A lot of people think international relations is like a game of chess. But it's not a game of chess, where people sit quietly, thinking out their strategy, taking their time between moves. It's more like a game of billiards, with a bunch of balls clustered together.'

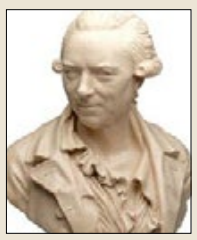
**Leonard Barden**: 'The worst blunders occur on the days when you're feeling in form and aren't expecting the chess gremlins to strike.'
*(The veteran chess journalist on his 'Blunder Theory', from an early 1960s BBC radio broadcast transcribed in the Penguin book 'Chess Treasury of the Air')*

**James Altucher**: 'In 1984 I became obsessed with chess. It was basically a replacement for the fact that no girl would go out with me. I had braces, acne, wild hair, and did I mention more acne?'
*(The chess-loving entrepreneur, business editor and bestselling author, on his popular podcast, The James Altucher Show, when he invited Garry Kasparov onto his show and finally got to play a game against his childhood chess hero)*



**Vlastimil Hort**: 'Try to play your games as if you are stroking a cat.'
*(Advice from the maestro, given to anyone who asks him how to improve their game, in Tibor Karolyi's 'Legendary Chess Careers' new book on Hort)*

**John Herrman**: 'Firing James Comey, the person in charge of an investigation into your associates, isn't a chess move; it's swiping the pieces off the board and walking away – a transparent display of dominance and power.'
*(Writing in The New York Times Magazine on a chess-themed critique of US President Donald J. Trump, entitled 'The Enduring Appeal of Seeing Trump as Chess Master-in-Chief')*



**François-André Danican Philidor**: 'A pawn, when separated from his fellows, will seldom or never make a fortune.'

**Harry Benson**: 'Bobby Fischer is the most interesting man I ever photographed or met.' *(In the new documentary, 'Harry Benson: Shot First', as the camera-toting legend describes one of his favourite subjects was Bobby Fischer, whom he developed an unlikely close relationship with in the run-up to his winning the World Championship title in 1972)*

# Levon Aronian bests Magnus Carlsen in World Champion's backyard

NEW IN CHESS

**The historical cast of Altibox Norway Chess 2017, the complete world top-10**
**Vishy Anand, Vladimir Kramnik, Sergey Karjakin, Levon Aronian,**

# Clash of the Titans

of February 2017 (when the last invitations were sent out): Wesley So, Hikaru Nakamura, Magnus Carlsen, Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, Fabiano Caruana and Anish Giri.

Altibox Norway Chess celebrated five years of top-flight chess in Stavanger with a stunning line-up replete with today's stars. Local hero Magnus Carlsen unambiguously declared his intentions, trouncing the elite in the opening blitz tournament, but stalled when the main event got underway. There, Levon Aronian stole the World Champion's limelight when he defeated him in a game for the ages to claim one of his finest victories. **ERWIN L'AMI** watched the action from up close and shares his impressions.

The organizers of the fifth Altibox Norway Chess billed the elite gathering in Stavanger with justified pride as 'The World's Strongest Chess Tournament', and not without reason either, since the 10 players they had invited in the course of February constituted the complete world Top 10 at that moment. True, by the time the first moves were played, Sergey Karjakin and Anish Giri had dropped to spots 11 and 12, and Shakhriyar Mamedyarov and Ding Liren – both absent in Norway – had entered the top-10, but only nit-pickers would regard these slight shifts in the world standings as a 'weakening' of this jubilee event, an anniversary edition that proved that Norway Chess has become one of the finest traditions in today's top-level chess. Just like last year, the tournament was covered live on TV2, which remains impressive to see, and the ambitions of the organizational team were palpable when they announced the dates for next year at the closing dinner.

On the eve of an event of this magnitude, the inevitable questions popped up again. Would Magnus Carlsen reaffirm his status as the absolute number 1 player in the world? The Norwegian had not yet won a tournament in 2017 and doubtlessly he'd be burning to repeat his win of last year when, following three unsuccessful tries, he finally won the tournament that would not have existed without him. Another point of attention was the fight for the two spots in next year's Candidates' tournament to be awarded on the basis of the average rating over 2017. Wesley So, Vladimir Kramnik and Fabiano Caruana are the big favourites in this race. And for all three of them this is not only a matter of prestige, since they had decided to forgo the Grand Prix cycle on the strength of their high ratings.

Which of them would do best in this super-strong contest? And another question, of considerable importance for the viewers worldwide: with such an elite line-up, would the players approach this very cautiously or, on the contrary, be ready to risk and gamble in search of greater glory?

### Starter

But first... there was blitz! As is the custom in Norway Chess, the first day saw a blitz-tournament to determine the pairings. In other words, which lucky participants would get five Whites in nine rounds and which ones would have the small handicap of playing five games as Black.

For the Norwegian fans the blitz was everything they could have hoped for, because Magnus Carlsen seemed to dispel all doubts about his current form. Playing dynamic and creative chess, he swept the field with 7½ out of 9, taking his blitz rating to an other-worldly 2944!

### Main Course

In the not so distant past, the chess world had a clear number 1 and 2: Magnus Carlsen and Levon Aronian. It was anticipated that these two would one day play a match for the highest crown. Although Magnus Carlsen is currently far away from his peak live-rating of 2889, he has remained number 1 for the past six years without anyone coming particularly close. For Aronian things unfortunately took a different turn, and he has been struggling with his form for the past two years or so. On occasion, the Armenian would have some good results, but his achievements came nowhere near the consistency he had shown before.

**'Playing dynamic and creative chess, Carlsen swept the field with 7½ out of 9, taking his blitz rating to an other-worldly 2944!'**

NOTES BY
**Levon Aronian**

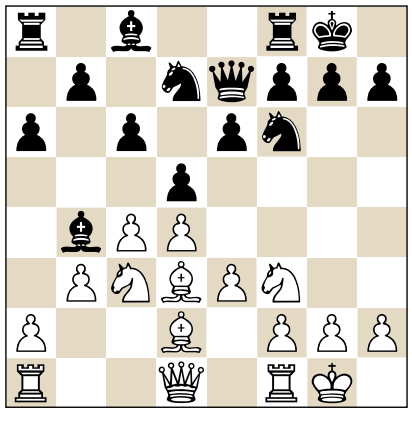
**Levon Aronian**
**Magnus Carlsen**
Stavanger 2017 (4)
Slav Defence

**1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 e6 5.e3 a6**
A surprise, but, in view of the fact that in recent times my opponent has often been playing the Slav, an explicable choice. As a rule I guess the choice of my opponents once every three times.

**6.b3**
I last played this variation in 2013 in four games, and in all four I was Black. Gelfand, Nakamura and Ding Liren preferred 6.c5, which leads to a ponderous strategic battle. The move in the game is considered less forceful, but I wanted to obtain a more lively game.

**6...♗b4**
The popularity of the move 6...c5 always nonplusses me. Black appears to have only one knight developed, and he makes another move with a pawn! Romantics...

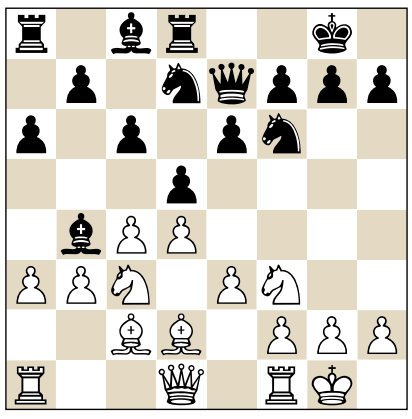
**7.♗d2 ♘bd7 8.♗d3 0-0 9.0-0 ♕e7** The second most popular move. In his match for the World Championship with Gelfand in 2012, Anand successfully tried the more direct 9...♗d6. After 9...♕e7 there is more scope for creative play.



**10.♗c2**
I found this move in 2005 or 2006. In principle the idea is very typical for this position, and even in the 10.♕e1 a5 variation 11.♗c2 is a good move. White prepares for play with the possible advance e4, and he simultaneously defends against 10...e5, to which there is a strong reply in the form of 11.♘xd5 cxd5 12.♗xb4 ♕xb4 13.dxe5, with advantage.

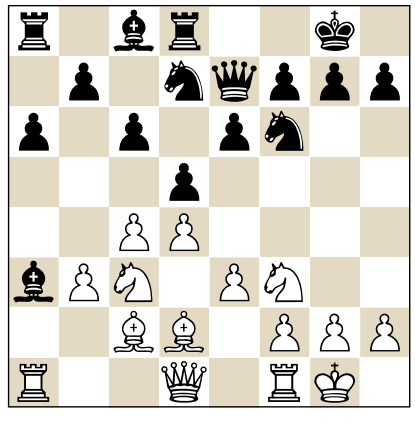
**10...♖d8**
A logical move, which, however, has a veiled but significant drawback.
Black also has other sound moves, in the form of 10...b6 or 10...♖e8. In these cases White's play involves either a pawn sacrifice by 11.a3 ♗xa3 12.e4, or preparation for the e4 advance by 11.♖e1.

**11.a3**



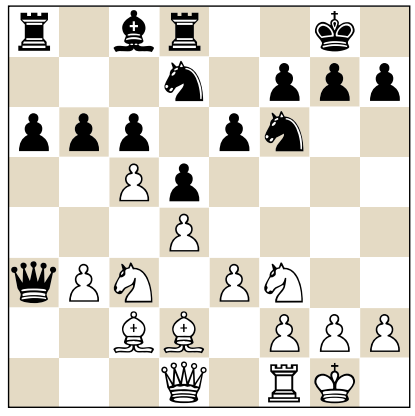
After thinking for 17 minutes and realizing that apart from a3 there were few other decent moves, I assumed that it was probably very dangerous to capture on a3.

**11...♗xa3**
The lesser evil was probably to go in for the passive but solid position after 11...♗d6 12.e4 dxe4 13.♘xe4 ♘xe4 14.♗xe4 ♘f6 15.♗g5, but in this case 10...♖d8 must be deemed a bad move.



**12.♖xa3**
12.e4 leads to compensation, but the timely possibility of raising the stakes could not be missed!

**12...♕xa3 13.c5 b6**
While my opponent was thinking I mainly studied 13...e5, which seemed to me to be the strongest. After 14.♘b1 ♕a2 15.♗b4 a5 16.♘c3 ♕xc2 17.♕xc2 axb4 18.♘a2 White has the advantage. The move in the game could have led to a rapid showdown.



**14.b4** A mistake. White had a simple way to gain an advantage, about which I did not even suspect anything. After the simple 14.♘b1 ♕a2 15.♕c1 (I forgot about this move and calculated only 15.♗b4, which leads to sharp play) Black has nothing

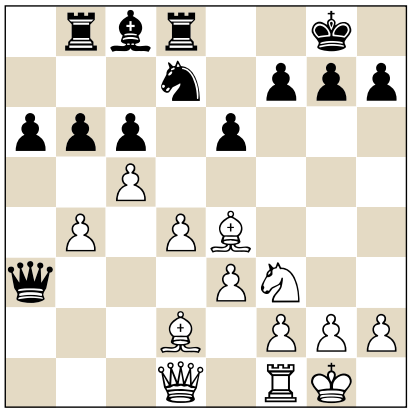
better than 15...bxc5 16.♘c3 ♕a5 17.♘xd5 ♕b5 18.♘c7 ♕b8 19.♘xa8 ♕xa8 20.♗a5 ♖e8 21.dxc5, with incurable damage to his position.

**14...♘e4**

The only way for Black to retain the tension in the play was the incredible 14...♕b2!. In principle this is logical – in order to save yourself against wild animals, you have to approach them and show that you are not afraid of them. Easier said than done.

**15.♘xe4 dxe4 16.♗xe4 ♖b8**

A move made after lengthy thought. Simple moves lead to unpleasant endgames where White possesses important trumps in the form of the d4/c5-pawns.

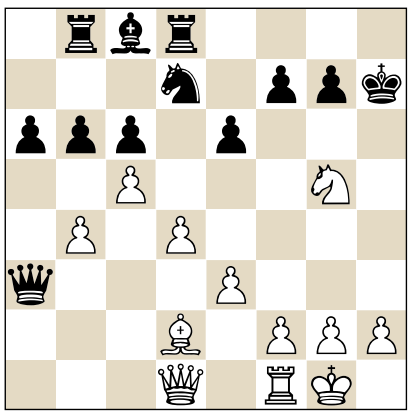


**17.♗xh7+** If 17.♗xc6 things did not seem altogether clear to me after 17...a5, while if 17.♕c2 I was concerned about 17...♘f6.

If the move in the game had not been so tempting, I would possibly have found the stronger 17.♕c2 ♘f6 18.♗xh7+ ♘xh7 19.♘e5, with the terrible threat of ♘c4.

**17...♔xh7** If 17...♔f8 there was the very strong 18.♕c2 bxc5 19.♘e5, with an attack leading to gain of material.

**18.♘g5+**



MARIA EMELIANOVA

**Game over. As Levon Aronian suppresses his joy and calmly signs his scoresheet, Magnus Carlsen realizes that once again it is going to be tough in Stavanger.**

**18...♔g8**

The only move, leading to a series of forced decisions. After 18...♔g6 19.♕g4 f5 20.♕g3 ♔f6 (20...f4 21.♕xf4 ♖f8 22.♕h4 with a winning attack) 21.d5 the black pieces are too passive for a proper defence of their monarch.

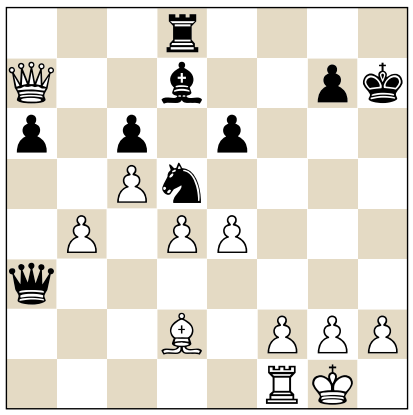
**19.♕h5 ♘f6 20.♕xf7+ ♔h8 21.♕c7 ♗d7 22.♘f7+ ♔h7**

I also reckoned that the king stands worse at g8 than at h7.

**23.♘xd8 ♖c8 24.♕xb6**

With the king on h7 White has the interesting possibility of playing 24.♕f4 ♖xd8 25.e4, with the threat of e5, but I was aiming for a position from my calculations.

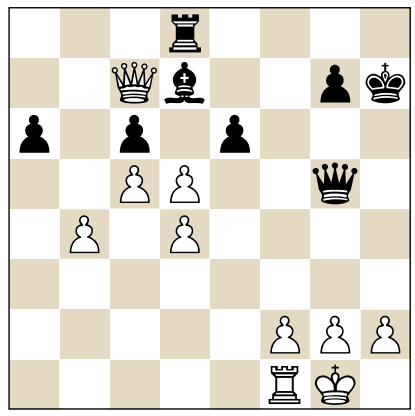
**24...♘d5 25.♕a7 ♖xd8 26.e4**



**26...♕d3**

A mistake, which both I and my opponent considered to be the strongest move. In my calculation of the move 17.♗xh7+ I assessed the position after 26...♘f6 27.♗g5 ♕xb4 (27...♔g6 is bad because of 28.♗xf6 ♔xf6 29.♕c7 ♔e7 30.d5) 28.e5 ♕xd4 29.exf6 gxf6 and thought that White had reason to be hopeful. To my surprise, it has to be admitted that White has only a small plus after 30.♕c7 ♖f8 31.♗e3.

**27.exd5 ♕xd2 28.♕c7 ♕g5**

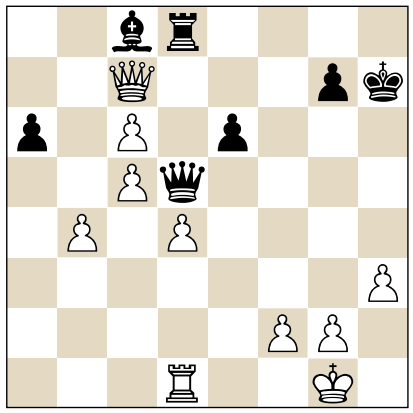


**29.dxc6** It is surprising, but this natural move is a blunder, denying White chances of winning.

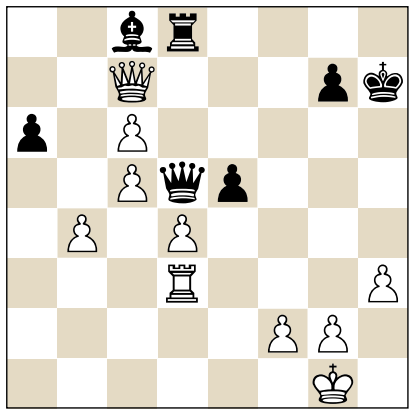
After the strongest move 29.d6 Black has few opportunities for counterplay and White can gradually activate his rook and achieve success.

It is important to note that after 29.d6 the idea 29...e5 30.dxe5 ♗h3 does not work because of 31.♕xc6, when the queen controls the situation.

**29...♗c8**
29...♗e8 loses material after 30.♕b7.
**30.h3 ♕d5**
If 30...e5 White wins by 31.f4 exf4 32.♕xf4, since the queen and rook come into play.
**31.♖d1**



**31...e5** A delay, which costs Black the game. He could have saved it with an attack on the f2-point by 31...♖f8. After both 32.♕d6 ♕b3 33.♕xf8 ♕xd1+ 34.♔h2 ♕xd4 and 32.♖d3 ♕e4 the result is a draw.
**32.♖d3**



The rook wreaks havoc in the black position.
**32...exd4 33.♕e7 ♗f5** 33...♖g8 was more resilient. **34.♖g3 ♗g6 35.♕h4+** Black resigned.
Of course there were many mistakes in the game, but on the other hand it was interesting enough.

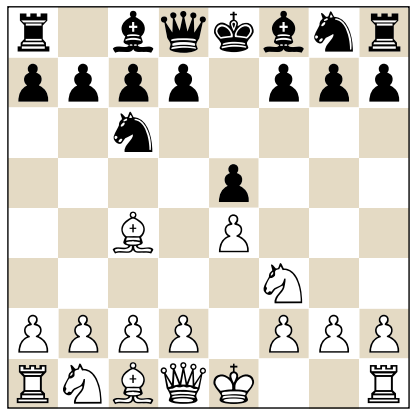
■ ■ ■

For Carlsen there was more misery in store. After drawing both his white games without creating anything against Giri and Vachier-Lagrave he faced a determined Vladimir Kramnik in Round 7.

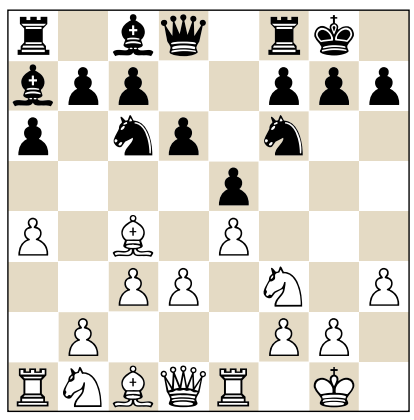
NOTES BY
**Erwin l'Ami**

**Vladimir Kramnik**
**Magnus Carlsen**
Stavanger 2017 (7)
Giuoco Piano

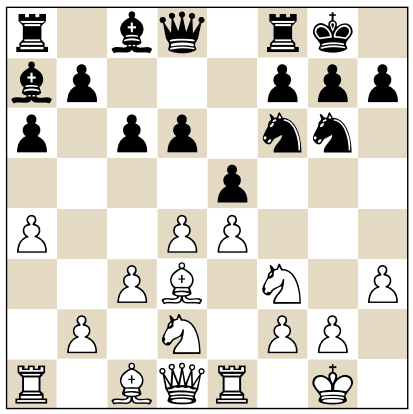
**1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗c4**



Philosophically speaking, I always found this move more logical than 3.♗b5, which doesn't even constitute a threat. The text-move at least hits f7. The difference between these moves surely runs deeper than this simple logic, but it's a fact that the Berlin (3...♘f6) has for the moment 'ruled out' the Ruy Lopez as an enviable option for White. Despite a brief period in the early 2000s, when Kramnik experimented, not overly successfully, with 1.e4, he used to be primarily an advocate of the closed games. Recently, however, Vladimir has started playing 1.e4 again, and with good results!
**3...♗c5 4.c3 ♘f6 5.d3 d6 6.0-0 a6 7.♖e1 ♗a7 8.a4 0-0 9.h3**

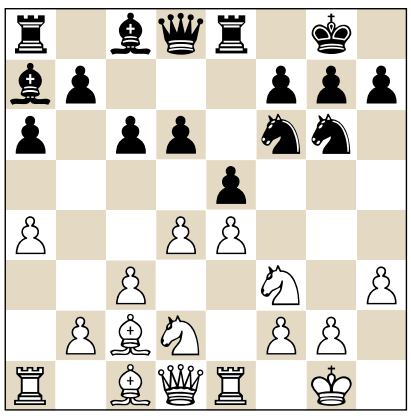


**9...♘e7** The standard manoeuvre in this type of position. The knight on c6 is badly placed because of the pawn on c3, so it gets a better spot on g6. Two days later, Magnus played 9...h6, keeping his options open. If White gains space on the queenside with 10.b4 then 10...♘e7 heading for g6 is a better version of the game, while 10.♘bd2 ♗e6 was how the game continued, with unclear play.
**10.d4 ♘g6**
I used to think these positions were pretty innocent, but practice has shown that if White manages to stabilize his centre while completing his development, he will be simply better here.
**11.♘bd2 c6 12.♗d3**

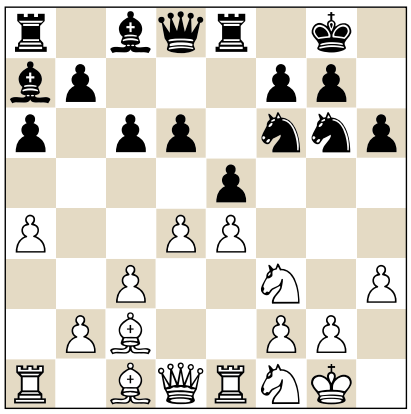


**12...♖e8**
Black has a few standard plans at his disposal, of which 12...exd4 13.cxd4 d5 14.e5 ♘h5 looks like the most natural one. It's all about timing in this very typical kind of position. If White is allowed to clamp down on the queenside with b4, ♘b3, etc., he is likely to be better, but Black won't sit still and will try to get play on the kingside connected with ...♘f4 and ...f7-f6. Here, though, there is a concrete reason why White is better, to wit 15.g3! ♗xh3 16.♘f1, when the h5-knight is suddenly in trouble: 16...f6 17.♘h4 ♘xg3 18.♘xg6 hxg6 19.e6 ♘e4 20.♗xe4 dxe4 21.♕b3!, with a double attack.
12...♘h5 13.♘f1 ♘hf4 is another typical idea, and I myself have been laughed at for trying 12...h6 13.♘f1 ♘h7 in a position very similar to this one. However, if Black can get ...♕f6, ...♘g5 and ....♘f4 in, things are not that simple.

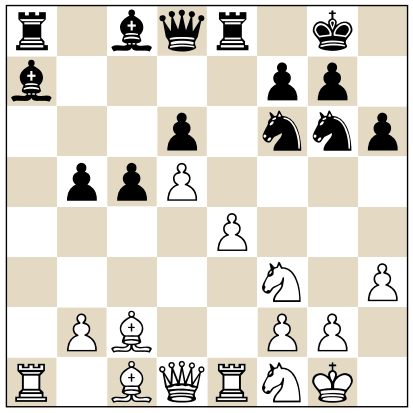
**13.♗c2!**
A strong prophylaxis that makes all the above-mentioned plans hard to realize for Black. The 'normal' 13.♘f1 would allow 13...d5, with simplifications.



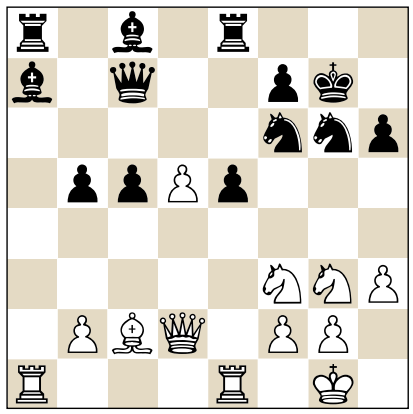
**13...h6**
Now both 13...d5 14.♘xe5 ♘xe5 15.dxe5 ♖xe5 16.♘f3 ♖e8 (when 17.e5 as well as 17.exd5 are likely to give White a sizeable advantage) and 13...♘h5 14.♘f1 ♘hf4 15.♘g3 (when Black has landed a knight on f4 but it's unclear what he should do next) are unpleasant. This means that White has managed to secure a stable advantage.
**14.♘f1**



**14...exd4**
14...d5 15.♘xe5 ♘xe5 16.dxe5 ♘xe4 wouldn't be all that bad but for 17.♗xe4 dxe4 18.♕xd8 ♖xd8 19.♗e3!, securing a serious advantage, since 19...♗b8 20.♗d4 loses the e-pawn.
The game continuation is a radical – and risky – attempt to change the course of the game.
**15.cxd4 c5 16.d5 b5** Magnus's point, and indeed, given a few more moves like ...♗d7 and ...c4, he will likely have a fine position, which makes the next few moves critical.
**17.axb5 axb5**



**18.♘g3** The key to this position is to get the bishop to the long diagonal asap. The fastest way to do so is 18.b3!, when Black is in big trouble. Have a look: 18...c4 (18...♗d7 19.♗b2 c4 20.bxc4 bxc4 21.♗c3 is just plain bad. White is very harmoniously placed and c4 is weak) 19.♗e3! (not falling for tricks on f2 and instead pinning the a7-bishop) 19...cxb3 20.♗xb3 and here, somewhat surprisingly, Black lacks a good move. Now 20...♕c7 21.♕c2! ♕b7 22.♕a2! wins material, since Black has no follow-up after 22...♗xh3 23.♗xa7.
**18...♗d7** 18...c4 is a desirable move in general, but just as in the note to the previous move, the pin is causing trouble after 19.♗e3 ♕c7 20.♖a2!, and 21.♕a1 is coming.
18...♕c7 is interesting, since 19.b3 can now be met by 19...c4 20.bxc4 bxc4 21.♗b2 c3!, blocking the diagonal. However, White has the stunning refutation 19.♗xh6! gxh6 20.♕d2, when the prettiest variation runs 20...♔g7 21.e5 dxe5 (21...♘xe5 22.♘xe5 dxe5 23.♖a6!),



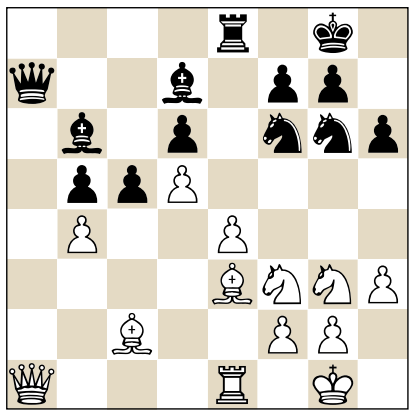
ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

22.♖a6!! and White forces access for the knight to either the f5- or the h5-square. This beautiful line continues 22...♘xd5 23.♘h5+ ♔h7 24.♖f6! ♗b7 25.♖xe5! ♖xe5 26.♖xf7+ ♕xf7 27.♘xe5 ♕e7 28.♗xg6+ ♔g8 29.♗f7+ ♕xf7 30.♘xf7 ♔xf7 31.♕xh6, and White should win.
Considering all the above, Magnus chose the right course of action.

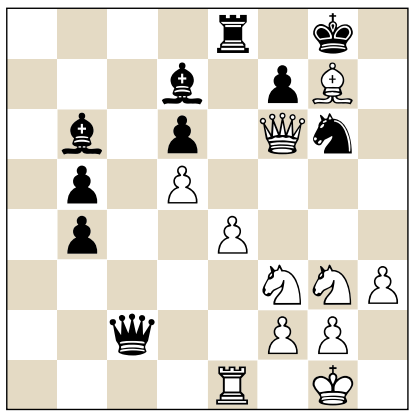
MARIA EMELIANOVA

**Vladimir Kramnik and Magnus Carlsen briefly discuss possible improvements of Black's play after the World Champion has suffered his second defeat.**

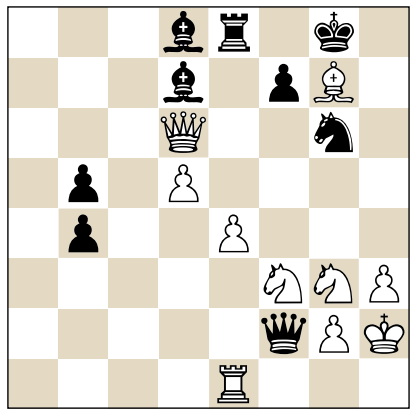
**19.♗e3**
19.b3 c4 20.♗b2 ♘e5 is now much less clear with the moves 18.♘g3 ♗d7 included.
**19...♗b6 20.♖xa8 ♕xa8**
Now Black has solved, or is very close to solving, all his opening problems. Kramnik is pinning his hopes on the next move, which still asks some questions.
**21.b4 ♕a7** What could be a more natural reaction? Yet I think 21...♕b8 was stronger, at least practically speaking, so as not to run into a tempo after White's next move.
**22.♕a1**



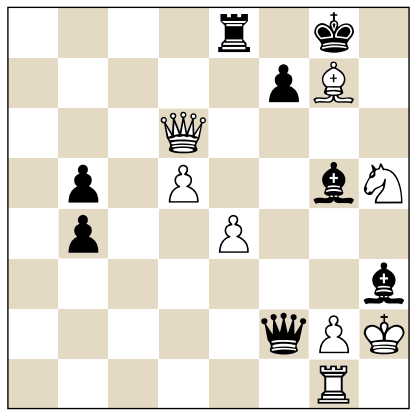
**22...♕c7** Very daring! I can imagine Magnus not fancying 22...♕xa1 23.♖xa1 ♖b8 all that much, when it's a two-result game in which Black will be suffering, but 22...♖c8!?, with the idea of 23.♕xa7 ♗xa7 24.♖a1 cxb4!, was an alternative.
**23.♗xh6 cxb4 24.♗xg7**
24.♖c1 ♕c3! maintains the balance, so the bishop keeps chipping away at Black's king's position.
**24...♕xc2 25.♕xf6**
25.♖e2 ♕xe2 26.♘xe2 ♔xg7 is a completely unclear position in which I'd probably choose Black.



**25...♕xf2+**
The wrong capture! It is very easy to miss that 25...♗xf2+ 26.♔h2 ♕c3! effectively puts an end to White's attack and will probably lead to a dynamically balanced endgame after 27.♖e2 ♕xf6 (or 27...♗xg3+ 28.♔xg3 ♗f5!!) 28.♗xf6 ♗c5. It is remarkable that Black should have survived after 23.♗xh6, which looks devastating.
**26.♔h2 ♗d8**
It's not clear to me whether 26...♘e5 27.♘xe5 ♕xf6 28.♗xf6 dxe5 29.♘h5 is actually lost, but with ♗xe5 in the air, it certainly looks extremely grim.
**27.♕xd6**
Of course! 27.♕d4 ♕xd4 28.♗xd4 f5! would spoil all the good work.



**27...♘h4**
It's important that 27...♗xh3 28.♔xh3 ♔xg7 can be coolly met by 29.♖e2 ♖h8+ 30.♔g4, when the white king is quite safe!
**28.♘xh4 ♗xh4 29.♘h5 ♗xh3 30.♖g1 ♗g5**



**31.♗f6**
During the game I was surprised that Kramnik did not wrap things up with the straightforward 31.♗d4 ♕xd4 32.gxh3 ♕f2+ 33.♖g2, but now I

# Celeb 64

John Henderson

**Heath Ledger**

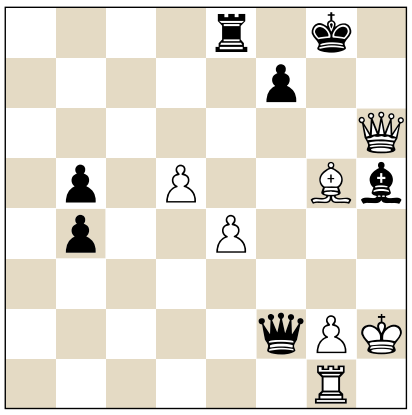
Of all the celebrities that could ever grace this column, only one features in a documentary on his life that starts with and then ends on a chess story: Heath Ledger, the multidimensional Australian actor who tragically had an untimely death aged 28 in 2008.
He died before the release of *The Dark Knight*, the hit Batman movie that saw his critically-acclaimed portrayal of The Joker going on to earn a posthumous Oscar for best supporting actor. But for the young Ledger, his first awards came not in acting but in chess.
In *I am Heath Ledger*, a new documentary that aired in May, Ledger tells in old MTV footage how he got the chess bug as a kid, and still loves to play chess every day. Ledger was, in fact, a very accomplished player in his youth, and won the Western Australian junior championship title, aged ten.
And when Ledger moved to the US to become a big movie star, the chess buzz remained. Friends revealed in the documentary that he was no stranger to frequent chessboard battles in New York's Washington Square Park, and was never happier than when screaming the occasional 'checkmate!'.
Yet sadly, at the time of his death he was planning on performing in and directing an adaptation of Walter Tevis' 1983 chess-related novel *The Queen's Gambit*. It wasn't to be; but his friends are hopeful that one day they'll make the movie to honour Ledger. ■

realize that there is 32...♕e3, complicating matters somewhat.

**31...♗g4**

31...♗xg2 32.♕g3! is a very cold shower. After the queen swap Black's entire army is hanging.

**32.♗xg5 ♗xh5 33.♕h6**



The last accurate move, winning a piece and the game.

**33...♖xe4 34.♕xh5 ♕f5 35.♕h6 b3 36.♗f6 ♕f4+ 37.♕xf4 ♖xf4 38.d6 ♖xf6 39.♖d1 ♖h6+ 40.♔g1**

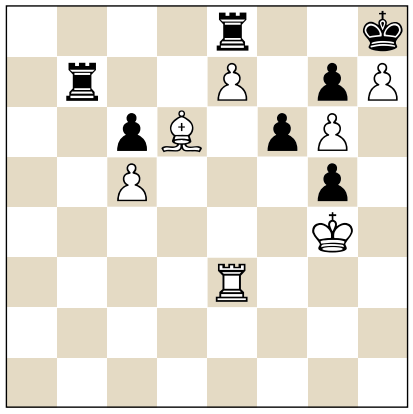
Black resigned.

■ ■ ■

A topsy-turvy win versus Karjakin in the penultimate round may have given Carlsen some consolation, but with a final score of -1 he obviously did not play any role in the fight for the top places. And since the World Champion was bleeding rating points, a situation arose that would have looked highly improbable not even all that long ago. For the first time in years, his closest pursuers in the world rankings came within 'one game' of catching him. For both Vladimir Kramnik and Wesley So this became a real prospect, and although Carlsen denied that he had given the issue any thought, he must have been relieved that at the end of the day, despite his 9.7 rating loss, he stayed ahead of Kramnik and So by a margin of 10 and 12 points respectively.

As for Wesley So, I don't have to remind the reader of his stunning achievements in the past year. His rise has been phenomenal, and I was curious to see what he was going to show here. As it was, he never quite got his tournament going and had to save some pretty bad positions to boot. He remained stuck on 50%, drawing all nine of his games. Looking back, the American champion must have been annoyed that he didn't convert his game against Sergey Karjakin, but I hope he also saw the humour in the way the 'Minister of Defence' saved the game.

**Wesley So**
**Sergey Karjakin**
Stavanger 2017 (4)



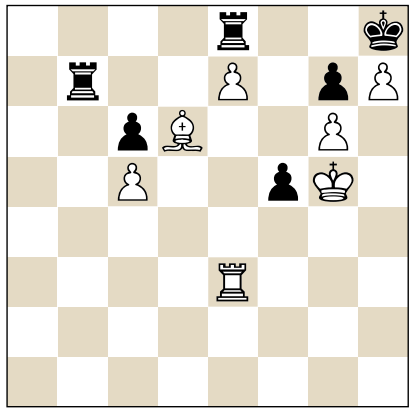
position after 65.♔g4

So could have decided the game in his favour earlier on, but this position looks pretty desolate for Black as well. At first glance Black can either resign, seeing no defence against ♔f5-e6-f7, or recognize the fact that the king on h8 has no moves...

**65...f5+!**

Karjakin first proceeds to get rid of his pawns.

**66.♔xg5** 66.♔xf5 g4 67.♔e6 g3! works like clockwork. Now 68.♔f7 g2 69.♖g3 g1♕ 70.♖xg1 ♖bxe7+! 71.♗xe7 ♖xe7+ 72.♔xe7 is stalemate.



**66...♖b1!**

Precision till the end! The careless 66...f4 67.♖e4 f3 68.♖f4 would get Black mated.

**67.♖a3 ♖g1+ 68.♔xf5**

With the pawns gone, it's now up to the 'rampant rooks' to decide the outcome.

**68...♖e1! 69.♖a2 ♖8xe7 70.♗xe7 ♖e5+ 71.♔xe5**

Stalemate. Vintage Sergey Karjakin!

However, Sergey did not save all his games, and back to back losses in Rounds 7 and 8 condemned him to last place. With his usual wit he referred to the previous two times he had participated in Norway Chess, in 2013 and 2014 (winning both times), joking: 'It seems that in Stavanger I am either first or last!'

Vladimir Kramnik showed inspired chess in Stavanger and was one of the most entertaining players. We already saw his win over Carlsen, but he also defeated Anand and Giri. The awesome strength of this fifth Norway Chess was aptly described on the eve of the tournament, when it was pointed out that Carlsen only needed to score plus one to keep his rating. Three wins, therefore, obviously made Kramnik a candidate for first place, but then the Russian also lost two games. The other 'veteran', Vishy Anand, had a rough start, but he managed to limit the damage by finishing on minus-1.

**'Since the World Champion was bleeding rating points, a situation arose that would have looked highly improbable not even all that long ago.'**

After the blitz event had ended in disaster, Anish Giri also lost in Round 1 against Nakamura. Things looked gloomy, but Anish showed resilience and stamina and by Round 4 he was back on 50 per cent.

NOTES BY
**Anish Giri**

**Anish Giri**
**Vishy Anand**
Stavanger 2017 (4)
English Opening

Although one has to be mildly insane or perhaps a family member of mine to consider me as one of the favourites in this tournament, my disastrous start nevertheless came as an unpleasant surprise to me. I finished the blitz tournament with five losses, got cyber-bullied by Magnus Carlsen in the process, and then went on to lose my first classical game as well.

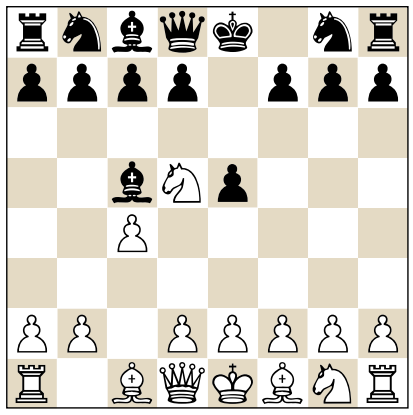
Then, however, things started looking up considerably, and after seeing Levon Aronian's red ears from up close in Round 3, I was optimistic going into the rest of the tournament. I should perhaps mention that Levon Aronian also got inspired by his encounter with me. Having survived the wildest of time-troubles, he went on to reach Nirvana by beating three good players and having one of his best tournaments in years. I extend my congratulations to him for this outstanding achievement.

**1.c4 e5 2.♘c3 ♗b4**

I had expected that after seeing my impressive game against Grischuk (which ended in a draw in the Moscow GP this year) nobody would repeat this line against me. Yet, my second and the author of this article had wisely warned me of the possibility of it appearing, given that Anand had gone for it on numerous occasions in the recent past.

**3.♘d5 ♗c5**

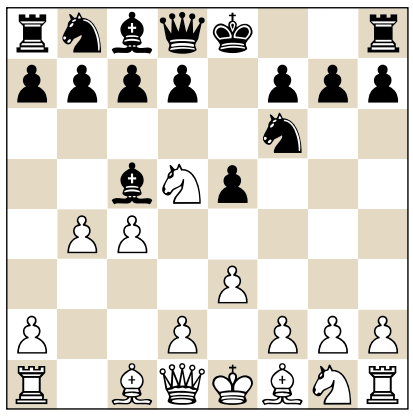
If Black now managed to force White to withdraw his knight to c3 (after being kicked with ...c6), he would have kind of gained a tempo. This, in essence, is the point of the 2...♗b4 3.♘d5 ♗c5 system that Vishy and his team have pretty much (re)invented.



**4.e3** My colleagues have no regard for the work I am doing, and time and again I witness White playing 4.♘f3 here. Even after two(!) impressive games I still saw that stubborn Italian-American refusing to follow the righteous path. It was no surprise to me that a couple of rounds later the game Caruana-Anand ended in a victory for Black after 4.♘f3 c6 5.♘c3 d6.

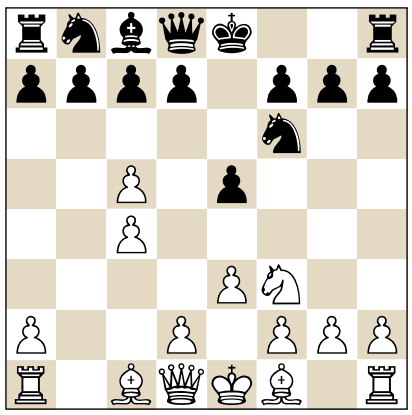
**4...♘f6** 4...c6 is met by 5.d4, which is essentially the main point of 4.e3!?.

**5.b4** 5.d4 ♘xd5 6.dxc5 ♘f6 7.b4 0-0 leads to similar positions, but for some reason my move gets a higher assessment from the computer, something like 1/5th of a pawn. There is usually a reason for such things.



**5...♘xd5** 5...♗e7 gives up the bishop pair without White having to compromise his pawn structure. Yet, having a lead in development has seduced some players, Vishy included, into playing this on occasion. Other bishop retreats on move 5 are rather hypermodern.

**6.bxc5 ♘f6 7.♘f3**



**7...♘c6**

A novelty. I remembered forgetting to switch off my computer one day and letting it run in this position. When I returned to it, this was the move it had assessed as the best option.

7...♕e7 8.♗e2 e4 9.♘d4 ♘a6 is what Grischuk played against me in Moscow. My move, 10.g4?, will not go into the books, but however bad, it scores rather high on the creativity scale.

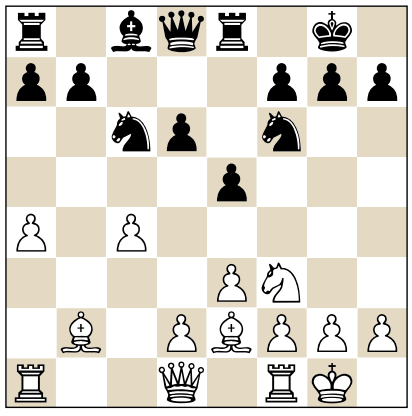
**8.♗e2 0-0 9.♗b2 d6**

I spent a great deal of time trying to come up with a sophisticated move order with all the ...e4s and ...b6s and ...♕e7s at Black's disposal in mind, and felt cheated when Vishy immediately went ...d6, the move he can make against any of my moves, with no regard to any move order.

**10.cxd6 cxd6**

My bishop pair is not the most active pair imaginable in this pawn structure, but I was still happy about it.

**11.0-0 ♖e8 12.a4!?**



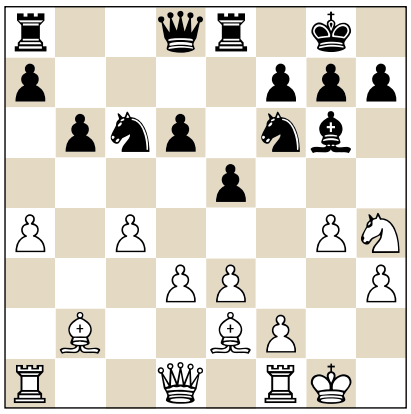
I could have gone 12.d4, 12.d3 or 12.h3, but given that each of these moves is

a bit committal, I wanted to make a fourth one and see how Vishy would react. It was also nice that with such a wide choice he would probably slow down and catch up with me on the clock.

**12...b6** A move. There were many other possibilities.

**13.d3 ♗g4** Somehow the game went so well for me after this that I felt that this was the wrong decision. That was not exactly the case. Giving up his second bishop for some kingside concessions was a reasonable idea from the legendary Tiger from Madras.

**14.h3 ♗h5 15.g4 ♗g6 16.♘h4**

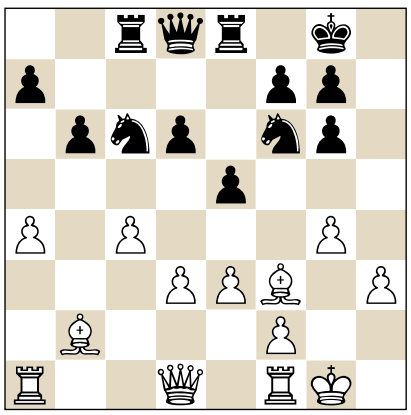


**16...♖c8** 16...♘xg4 17.♘xg6 ♘h6! sent some shivers down my spine, but fortunately I quickly realized that I could always pick up the e5-pawn, when my bishop on f3 secures my king's safety to a reasonable extent: 18.♗f3 ♖c8 19.♘xe5 dxe5 20.♗e4, and with the queen coming to f3 and the knight unable to jump to f5 and h4 quickly, I think White is still somewhat in charge of the proceedings.

**17.♘xg6**

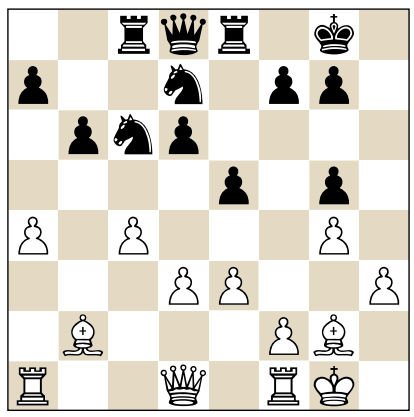
I no longer wanted to consider ...♘xg4 on every move.

**17...hxg6 18.♗f3**



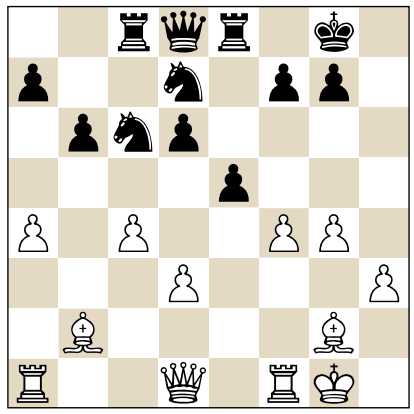
**18...g5** A typical move in the variations of the Slav in which White picks up the bishop pair with the h3-g4, ♘h4xg6 manoeuvre. Here, however, I am not sure it was equally efficient. 18...♘d7 would make it hard for White to open the position, since it is difficult to stabilize the bishop on d5: 19.♗c3 (19.♗a3 ♘c5 20.♗d5 ♘e7 21.♗g2 ♘c6 asks White about his plans) 19...♘c5 20.♗d5, and now, besides the sad ...♘e7-c6, Black can toss in 20...e4!?, with a balanced but complicated position.

**19.♗g2 ♘d7**



On the one hand I felt that White was slightly better, on the other, manoeuvring around slowly might actually make it harder to break through, since the number of pawn breaks is limited and Black would be able to get his pieces ready in time. Without hesitating much I decided to blast the kingside open and pray for things to work out. After all, the force of the bishops was with me.

**20.f4!? gxf4 21.exf4**



**21...♘c5?** This was where the game started going wrong for Black. Things just don't work out for him tactically, since White will be able to stabilize the monster-bishop on d5.

21...♘d4 was possible, and better than the game move.

The strongest move, however, was 21...♕h4!, e.g. 22.fxe5 dxe5 23.♔h2 ♘c5 (this is, in fact, based on some insane calculation and is by no means forced. 23...♘f6 is also fine for Black) 24.♗d5 ♘e6 25.♕f3 ♘g5! 26.♗xf7+ ♔f8! 27.♗a3+. I actually recall calculating this (or a very similar) variation. I was fascinated by 27...♘e7? 28.♗d5+!! ♘xf3+ 29.♖xf3+ ♕f6 30.♖af1, but 27...♖e7! maintains the balance.

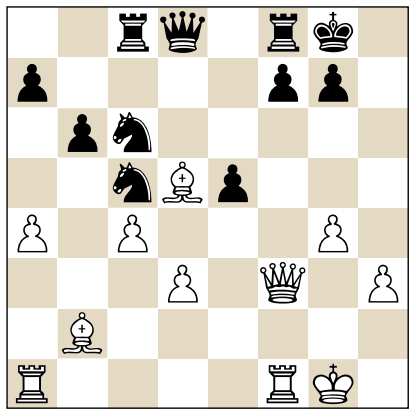
**22.fxe5 dxe5** After 22...♘xe5 23.d4 one of the knights can pick up the b2-bishop, but there is no coming back from that.

**23.♗d5!** With ♕f3 coming, Black is suddenly in real trouble.

**23...♖f8**

23...♖e7 24.♕f3 ♕d7 25.♖ae1 ♘b4 26.♖xe5 ♘xd5 27.♖xd5 is just a pawn, and actually similar to what will eventually happen in the game.

**24.♕f3**



**24...♕d7?**

24...♕f6! was a lot tougher, but I can imagine that there are many people, myself included, to whom such sad moves just won't occur: 25.♕xf6 gxf6 26.♖xf6 ♘xd3 27.♗a3 ♘cb4 28.♖d1 ♘xd5 29.cxd5 ♘c5, with a very bad endgame, although it is not inconceivable that Black will survive this.

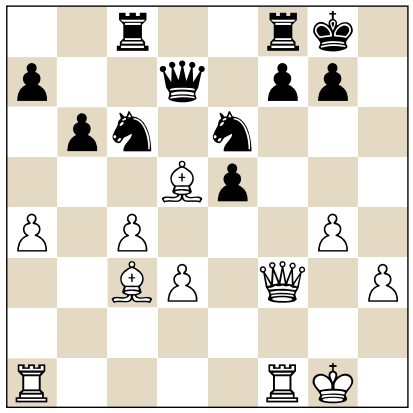
**25.♗c3?!** This was my original intention, stopping ...♘b4. I did seriously consider the natural 25.♖ae1!, which was also stronger, but decided that my original intention was even

LENNART OOTES

**Anish Giri showed resilience as he fought back with a win against Vishy Anand. 'I was very happy to get this win in against the legendary ex-World Champion, an icon of our sport.'**

more clear-cut: not allowing any forward knight jumps. I had missed the retrograde one to e6.
So 25.♖ae1 would indeed have been better, when 25...♘xa4 26.♗a3! wins easily. There are no tricks: 26...♘d4 27.♕f2 ♘c5 28.♖xe5, and Black is lost. After 25...♘b4 (instead of 25...♘xa4) 26.♖xe5 ♘bxd3 27.♖g5 ♘xb2 I am not sure I saw 28.♕f6 ♘e6!, but 28.♖xg7+! does it: 28...♔xg7 29.♕f6+ ♔g8 30.♕g5+ ♔h7 31.♖f6 ♖c6 32.♕h6+ ♔g8 33.♖xc6 ♘e6 34.♖xe6, and there is just no stopping ♖g6+.

**25...♘e6!**

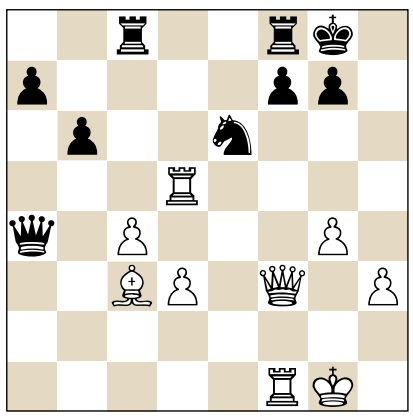


Now Black is to some extent back in the game and fighting.

**26.♖ae1**

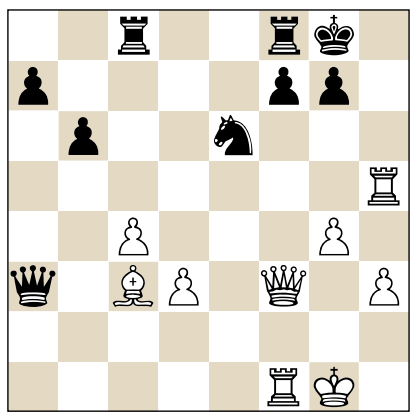
I thought I was still winning, since 26...♘f4 will be met by 27.♖xe5!, but Vishy correctly decided to give up the pawn for my monster bishop.

**26...♘e7! 27.♖xe5 ♘xd5 28.♖xd5 ♕xa4?!** This actually loses, but at least it puts some pressure on White in time-trouble. You have to punish it now. 28...♕e7 is no fun, especially considering that 29.g5! would keep the initiative as well.



**29.g5?!**

My original intention was 29.♖h5, but upon seeing the variations I lost faith in it and picked the second-best move. Now White is clearly not winning, but Black is still under enormous pressure.
The right way to go was indeed 29.♖h5!, threatening various mating ideas:
– 29...♖c5, a logical defensive attempt: 30.♗e5! f6 31.♕f5! ♘g5, and here I missed the simple 32.d4!, when it's lights out after, for example, 32...♖cc8 33.♗xf6!.
– 29...♕a3 is met by the only, but brilliant, move

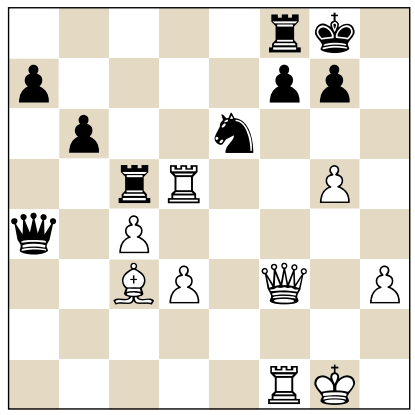


ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

30.♗f6!! (30.♕e4 ♘g5! is easy to miss as well).

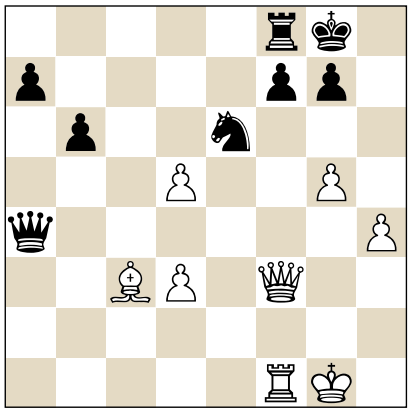
**29...♖c5?!**

Natural, but not the most resilient option.
To be preferred was 29...a5 30.h4 ♕c6!? 31.h5 ♘c7 32.♖f5 ♕xf3 33.♖1xf3, when Black has to deal with a serious threat in h5-h6, although I wouldn't be surprised if with some very precise play he would be able to suffer his way out of it.

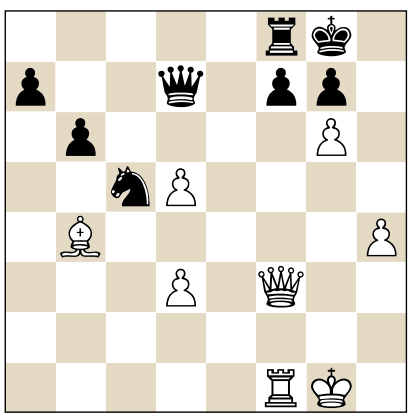


**30.h4?!** There was not much time for cunning decisions, given that there were still 10 moves to be made before time would be added to the clock. I saw the piece sacrifice, but it looked rather desperate.
Stronger was 30.♕f5!, as the game move allows Black to give up the knight for three pawns. The threat of g6 is strong.

**30...♖xd5 31.cxd5**



**31...♘c5?** Now it's gone. He should have played 31...♕xh4 32.dxe6 ♕xg5+ 33.♔h2 (33.♕g2 ♕e3+!) 33...♕h6+ 34.♔g2 ♕xe6 35.♖e1 ♕d6 36.♖e3. **32.g6!** This was probably what Vishy had missed. **32...♕d7 33.♗b4!**



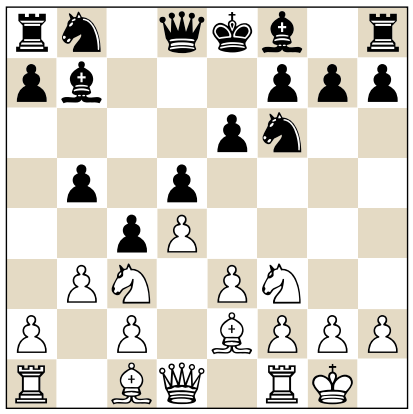
And there is nothing to be done against d4. Black resigned.

I was very happy to get this win in against the legendary ex-World Champion, an icon of our sport. Seeing, however, that the current World Champion had just lost his first game in his home tournament as well, it was clear that my happy win was unfortunately not going to be the main topic that day.

■ ■ ■

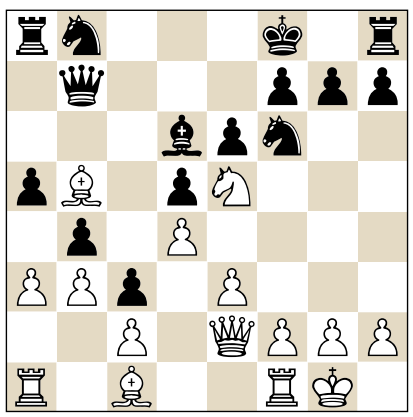
Anish eventually finished with a 50 per cent score, but only after many more adventures! Wesley So got away with a draw after having taken a highly poisonous pawn, and against MVL 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♘c3 g6 led to a Dragon(!), in which Anish felt much more at home. Not only in his game against Giri, but also against Kramnik, the Frenchman looked somewhat underprepared, and while he got away with a point against Kramnik, Anish was less generous! In the end it was Big Vlad himself who had to stop Anish in the final round. He did so after Anish reacted wrongly to a huge provocation in the opening.

**Vladimir Kramnik**
**Anish Giri**
Stavanger 2017 (9)



position after 8.♘c3

After a 16-minute think Kramnik had played 8.♘c3, which led to the diagrammed position. Now Anish initially reacted well with **8...b4 9.♘a4 c3,** when it looks as if White is in trouble. How is he to ever get his c1-bishop into the game? **10.♘e5** If Black gets to complete his development, he is likely to be much better. Correct is 10...♕c7 (slightly more precise than 10...♘c6 11.♘xc6 ♗xc6 12.♗a6!?) in order to meet 11.♗b5+ with 11...♘c6, after which Black can finish his development with ...♗d6 and ...0-0, and Black is better. But why not start with the bishop? **10...♗d6** Kramnik demonstrates why: **11.a3 a5 12.♗b5+** Forcing a king move. **12...♔f8 13.♘c5 ♕b6 14.♘xb7 ♕xb7 15.♕e2**



And with f3/e4 coming, Black is in huge trouble. He sped things up with **15...g6?! 16.e4!**, when the c1-bishop joined the fray decisively, and after **16...♘xe4 17.♗h6+ ♔e7 18.f3 ♘d2 19.♖fe1 ♔d8 20.♗f4** Giri threw in the towel.

Hikaru Nakamura was leading the tournament from the get-go after beating Giri on the first day and winning an impressive game against Vachier-Lagrave in Round 4. However, on the final day it was fellow American Fabiano Caruana who stood in the way of a nice finish for Naka. So far, I have not given Caruana much attention in this report, and for good reason. Caruana's Queen's Gambit Accepted and Petroff quickly earned him the nickname 'the accountant', courtesy of Nigel Short. Going into the final round, he was on -1 without any wins and not looking particularly inspired. However, the overall score between Caruana and Nakamura is massively in Caruana's favour. In their final-round encounter, Fabiano went for it hammer and tongs in a theoretical battle in the Najdorf, and just like in London six months ago, he won that battle.

NOTES BY
**Fabiano Caruana**

**Fabiano Caruana**
**Hikaru Nakamura**
Stavanger 2017 (9)
Sicilian Defence, Najdorf Variation

I had been having a dismal event and wasn't playing for much in terms of overall result, but I had a hope to finish the tournament on 50%, so I felt motivated to win. Hikaru had been having a great event, and with a win in this game would likely tie for first, so I was sure he would also come out swinging.

**1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4**

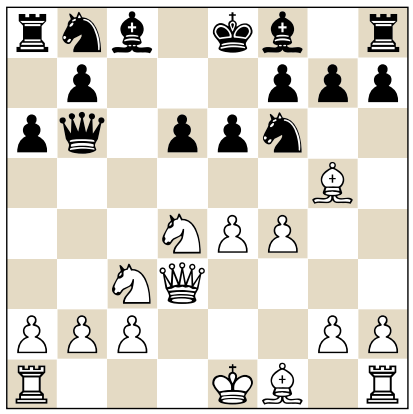
**4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6**

Over the years we've had our share of Najdorf battles. The most recent one, in London, I won with some good preparation (see Caruana's notes in New In Chess 2017/1 – ed.), but Naka was up for another theoretical duel.

**6.♗g5 e6 7.f4 ♕b6**

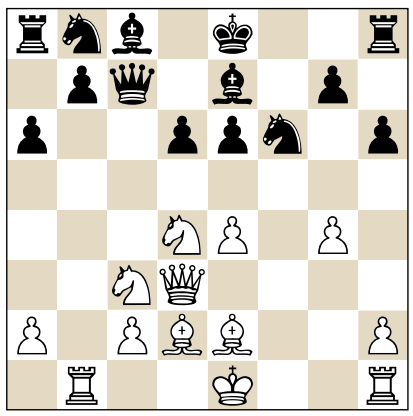
7...h6 8.♗h4 ♕b6 was played in London, following in the footsteps of MVL. However, the tried and tested method is the immediate Poisoned Pawn Variation, which has been a rock for Najdorf players for decades; White has never been able to find a reliable antidote.

**8.♕d3**



Not as common as 8.♕d2, but still a well-explored move, which was originally championed by the late, great Vugar Gashimov and several other top Azeri players. Hikaru himself played 8.a3 and beat Nepomniachtchi not long before this game.

**8...♕xb2 9.♖b1 ♕a3 10.f5 ♗e7 11.fxe6 fxe6 12.♗e2 ♕a5 13.♗d2 ♕c7 14.g4 h6**



There were numerous options for both sides on the way, but we quickly went for the main starting position

MARIA EMELIANOVA

**In the last round Fabiano Caruana beat Hikaru Nakamura. In another theoretical duel between the two Americans in the Najdorf, a new idea, 'analysed long before', proved extremely dangerous.**

of this line. White has tried countless attempts to break down Black's defence here, with no outstanding results. Probably the best known game in this line is Gashimov-Grischuk, where Grischuk won by marching his king to b1 with a board full of pieces.

**15.♖g1!?**

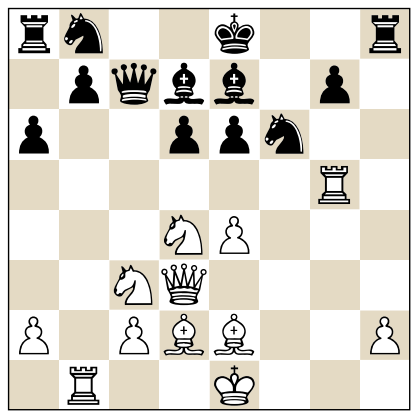
This is the new move, which I had analysed long before and hadn't expected to get in this game! Fortunately, I remembered the main details of my analysis and I was able to work out the rest while Hikaru was thinking. Previously, the main moves had been 15.♕h3 and 15.e5, and while 15.♖g1 isn't necessarily better than other moves, it is very difficult for Black to navigate the maze of options over the board.

**15...♗d7**

15...♘c6 16.♘xc6 ♕xc6 17.e5 dxe5 18.♕g6+ ♔f8 19.g5 hxg5 20.♕xg5 was another line I had spent lots of time analysing. Black's best is 20...♔e8!, which is in my view a very challenging move to find over the board.

**16.g5 hxg5 17.♖xg5**

Now Black has a big choice to make. I spent a solid 45 minutes pacing, waiting in anticipation to see how Hikaru would respond.



**17...♘c6!?**

This one really surprised me though! I knew the move was decent for Black, but it's so risky and difficult to calculate that I never expected anyone to play it.

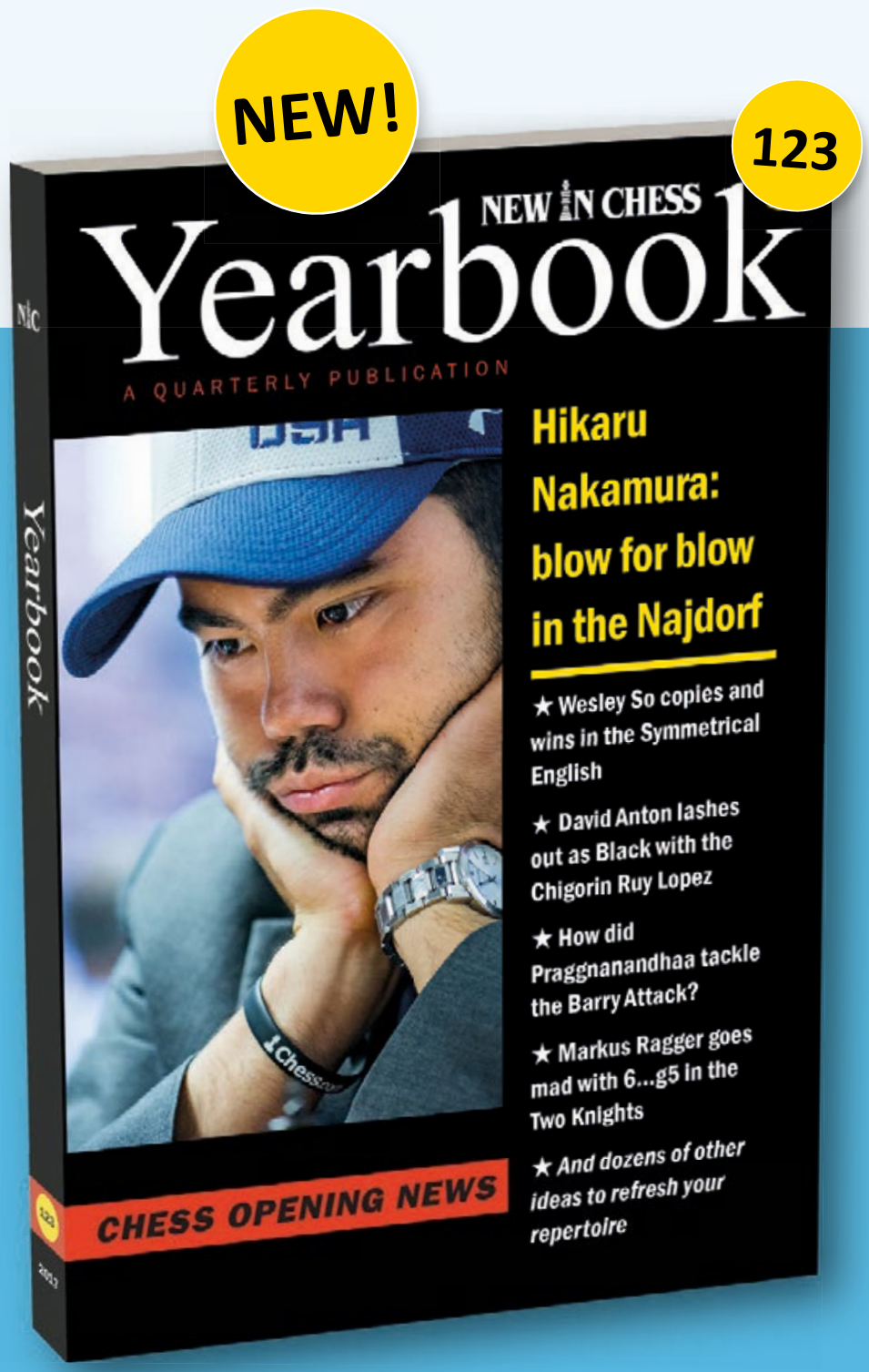
17...♖g8? surprisingly just loses: 18.e5 dxe5 19.♘e4! exd4 (19...♘xe4 20.♗h5+ ♔d8 21.♘xe6+ winning) 20.♘xf6+ ♗xf6 21.♗h5+ ♔d8 22.♗a5, and the queen is lost! Beautiful geometry.

17...♖h7 is a good move, which will likely lead to a draw, but Black will have to walk a tightrope for many moves to come.

**18.♖xg7 0-0-0**

# “There is something about nearly every opening one can think of.”

***British Chess Magazine***


NEW!
123
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A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION
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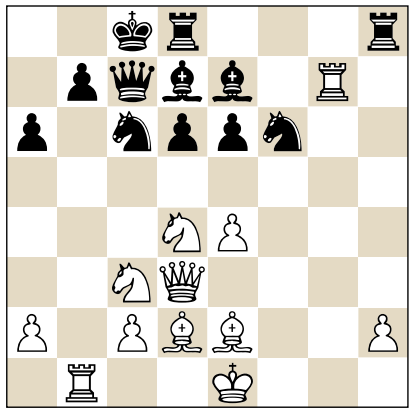
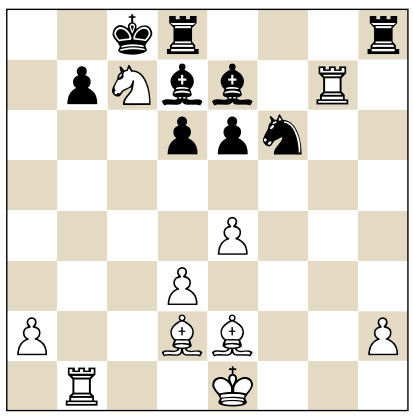


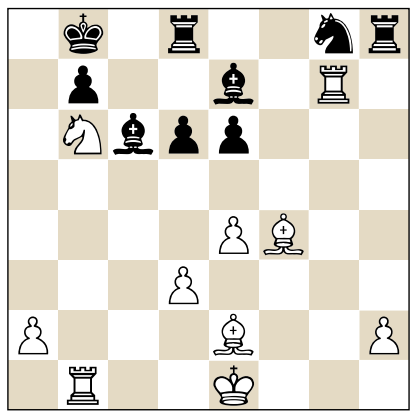
**19.♘cb5**
This is the reason why 17... ♘c6 is so dangerous to play. Naka definitely saw this possibility, and probably intuitively felt the ensuing endgame would be tenable. That's 100% correct, but Black still has some work to do before the draw is guaranteed!
19.♕xa6? is cute, but doesn't contain a strong threat, so Black can safely play 19...♘xd4.
19.♘db5 amounts to the same thing as the game.
**19...axb5 20.♘xb5 ♘e5!** The only move. 20...♕b8?? 21.♖xe7 is lights out. **21.♘xc7 ♘xd3+ 22.cxd3** Here Hikaru thought for a long time, and it became clear after a while that what he had intended didn't satisfy him. He began to become visibly upset with his position.



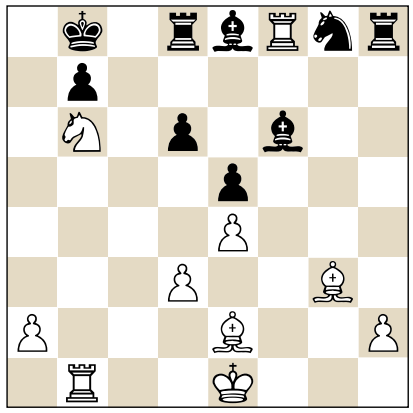
**22...♘g8?** And this awful move was the result. Black was not at all in such dire straits to place his knight passively on the back rank.
After 22...♖xh2! 23.♖c1 ♖h1+ 24.♗f1 ♔b8 25.♖xe7 looks like a piece, but after the strong 25...♖f8! White loses it back because of the pin. The position quickly simplifies and peters out to a draw. For example: 26.♘xe6 ♗xe6 27.♗h6 ♖xh6 28.♖xe6 ♖h1 29.♔d2 ♘xe4+ 30.dxe4 ♖hxf1 31.♖xf1 ♖xf1 32.♖xd6 ♖f2+ 33.♔e3 ♖xa2, with a draw.
Even 22...♖h7, though not ideal, was better than the passive solution Hikaru chose.
**23.♘a8?**
This is a natural and obvious choice, but spoils a part of the advantage.
23.♗a5! was likely winning: 23...♖xh2, and here the cool 24.♔d2! is absolutely awful for Black. His pieces are all tied up, and if 24...♗f8,

**'I could see it dawned on Hikaru that his position is now completely lost.'**

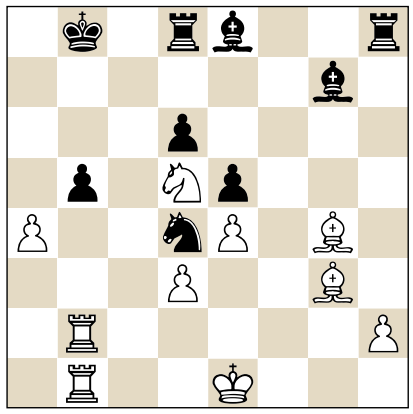
25.♘b5! is an important point. The rook is indirectly defended because of the attack on d6!
**23...♔b8 24.♘b6 ♗c6 25.♗f4**



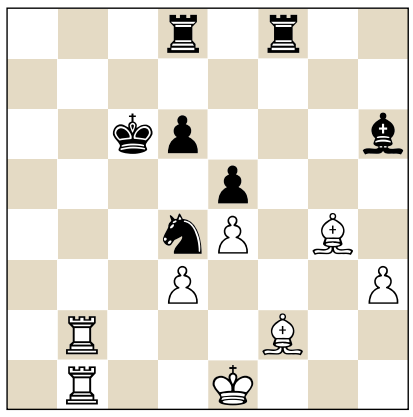
**25...e5?** I was very happy to see this. I was more worried that he would activate his passive bishop.
25...♗f6! 26.♖g2 ♘e7 looks a lot more harmonious to me. Black still has reasonable drawing chances.
**26.♗g3** Now it already seems like a technical task.
**26...♗f6 27.♖f7 ♗e8 28.♖f8**
It's rare to see a rook like that, wedged right in between Black's army, trapped but also choking Black's entire position.



**28...♗g7 29.♖f2 ♘e7 30.♗g4**
An accurate move. The rook is swinging over to b2 to participate in the attack. I could see it dawned on Hikaru that his position is now completely lost.
**30...♘c6 31.♖fb2 ♘d4 32.♘d5 b5**
32...♗c6 33.♘e7, and it all falls apart.
**33.a4**

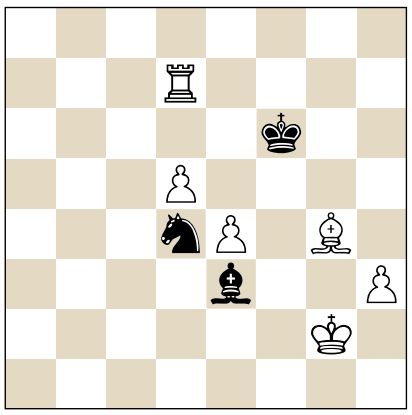


Now I win a second pawn, the game is decided. To compound his problems, Hikaru was running low on time.
**33...♗h6 34.axb5 ♖g8 35.h3 ♔b7 36.♘e7** The final blow is the knight coming to c6. Black's king is opened up and will get stuck in a mating net.
**36...♖f8 37.♘c6 ♗xc6 38.bxc6+ ♔xc6 39.♗f2**



With the simple but deadly threat of 40.♗xd4 and 41.♖c2, mating.

**39...♖xf2 40.♔xf2 ♖f8+ 41.♔g2 ♗e3 42.♖b8 ♖xb8 43.♖xb8 d5 44.♖c8+ ♔d6 45.♖d8+ ♔e7 46.♖d7+ ♔f6 47.exd5 e4 48.dxe4**



I think at this point the game could have been safely resigned. An exchange and three pawns is usually sufficient to win.

**48...♗f4 49.h4 ♘b5 50.h5 ♗e5 51.♗f5 ♔g5 52.♗g6 ♘d6 53.♖e7 ♘c4 54.♖e6 ♗f6 55.d6 ♘e5 56.♗f5 ♘d3 57.♖xf6 ♔xf6 58.d7 ♔e7 59.h6** Black resigned.

■ ■ ■

Which takes us back to the proud winner, Levon Aronian, the only participant in this fifth Norway Chess, besides Magnus Carlsen, who had played in all editions so far. Winning such a tournament with a one-point difference is a huge feat. Aronian is now back in the 2800s and rumour has it that he intends to stay there! Let's round off with the game that effectively decided the tournament: Aronian's victory over Vladimir Kramnik.

NOTES BY
**Erwin l'Ami**

**Levon Aronian**
**Vladimir Kramnik**
Stavanger 2017 (6)
Queen's Gambit Declined, Semi-Tarrasch Defence

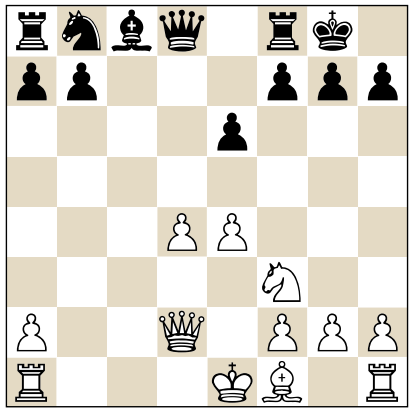
**1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 c5**

The Semi-Tarrasch does not come as a surprise, since it is Kramnik's latest attempt to destroy 1.d4.

**5.cxd5 ♘xd5**

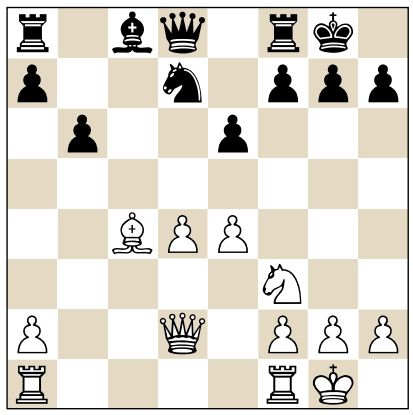
5...cxd4 6.♕xd4 exd5 was a more or less forgotten line until Kramnik played it against Aronian in 2011. Nowadays the line has been analysed to a slightly worse endgame that Wei Yi managed to hold a couple of times.

**6.e4 ♘xc3 7.bxc3 cxd4 8.cxd4 ♗b4+ 9.♗d2 ♗xd2+ 10.♕xd2 0-0**



In short: Black is banking on the fact that trading off two pairs of minor pieces will compensate for handing over a certain amount of space. His next moves are easy – ♘d7, b6, ♗b7 – with a solid game that practice has shown is hard to crack.

**11.♗c4 ♘d7 12.0-0 b6**



**13.♖ac1!?**

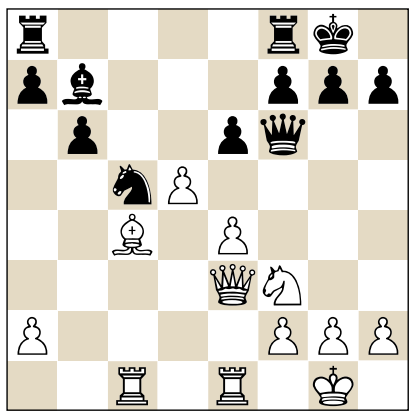
No fewer than 12 moves have been played in this position, and this rook move is one of the very rare options. Indeed, the rooks are more often seen on d1 and e1, but Kramnik would have obviously been prepared for it. This is modern preparation in action; trying to get your opponent out of book and pose him some serious problems to solve over the board.

**13...♗b7 14.d5** And this concrete follow-up must have come as a huge surprise. Given that d4-d5 hands Black the c5-square White is usually reluctant to push it too early.

**14...♘c5**

It is not entirely clear to me how Aronian planned to recapture after 14...exd5, but the game continuation is in any case more principled.

**15.♖fe1 ♕f6 16.♕e3**



**16...♖ac8** Only after this move did Aronian have his first real think, indicating that he, too, was now out of his preparation. After the game

**Stavanger 2017** — **cat. XXII**

| | | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | | TPR |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Levon Aronian | IGM | ARM | 2793 | * | ½ | 1 | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | 1 | 1 | 6 | 2923 |
| 2 | Hikaru Nakamura | IGM | USA | 2785 | ½ | * | ½ | 0 | ½ | 1 | 1 | ½ | ½ | ½ | 5 | 2842 |
| 3 | Vladimir Kramnik | IGM | RUS | 2808 | 0 | ½ | * | ½ | ½ | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | ½ | 5 | 2839 |
| 4 | Fabiano Caruana | IGM | USA | 2808 | ½ | 1 | ½ | * | ½ | ½ | ½ | 0 | ½ | ½ | 4½ | 2796 |
| 5 | Wesley So | IGM | USA | 2812 | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | * | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | 4½ | 2796 |
| 6 | Anish Giri | IGM | NED | 2771 | ½ | 0 | 0 | ½ | ½ | * | 1 | 1 | ½ | ½ | 4½ | 2800 |
| 7 | Maxime Vachier-Lagrave | IGM | FRA | 2796 | ½ | 0 | 1 | ½ | ½ | 0 | * | ½ | ½ | ½ | 4 | 2754 |
| 8 | Viswanathan Anand | IGM | IND | 2786 | ½ | ½ | 0 | 1 | ½ | 0 | ½ | * | ½ | ½ | 4 | 2755 |
| 9 | Magnus Carlsen | IGM | NOR | 2832 | 0 | ½ | 0 | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | * | 1 | 4 | 2750 |
| 10 | Sergey Karjakin | IGM | RUS | 2781 | 0 | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | 0 | * | 3½ | 2719 |

**Wesley So and Vladimir Kramnik proved a winning combination on the first free day when the players competed on a farm, driving tractors and milking cows.**



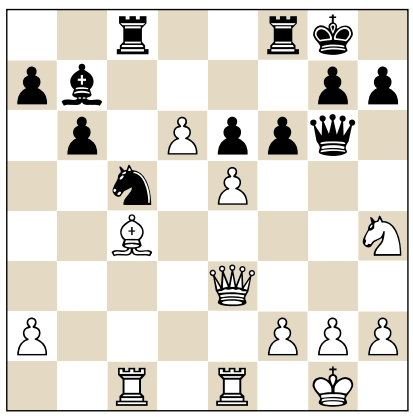
Kramnik indicated 16...♖ad8 as an improvement, and indeed, 17.e5 can now be solidly met by 17...♕g6 18.d6 f6!. I will explain later why the rook is far better placed on d8 in this line.

**17.e5 ♕g6 18.d6**

Black must do his utmost to prevent White from consolidating. If White succeeds, he has a huge advantage with his passed d-pawn.

**18...f6 19.♘h4**

Perhaps the critical moment of the game. Where to move the queen?



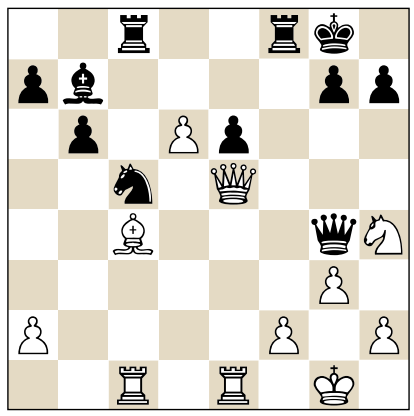
**19...♕g4**

The big difference between 16...♖ad8 and 16...♖ac8 lies in the variation 19...♕g5 20.♕xg5 fxg5 21.♘f3 ♗xf3 22.gxf3 ♖xf3, when 23.♗xe6+! decides on the spot! However, after 22...♔f7 I don't think Black has much to worry about. Aronian proposed 23.h4 on the live-show, but the ruthless comp happily plays 23...gxh4 24.f4 ♔g6!.

Best was probably 19...♕h5, keeping an eye on e5. I don't see a clear way to continue for White: 20.♕h3 fxe5! 21.♗xe6+ ♘xe6 22.♕xe6+ ♕f7 can only be better for Black after a queen swap, which perhaps makes 20.♕d4 a better try, with White preparing for g2-f4 and f2-f4.

**20.g3 fxe5** An off-day for Kramnik. Although White is already on top, it would still be a big fight after, say, 20...♔h8, with the idea of 21.f4 g5!?

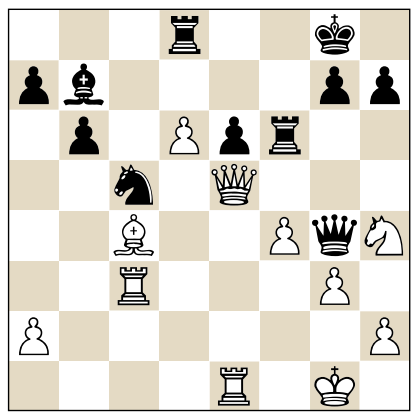
**21.♕xe5**



**21...♖cd8** After 21...♔h8 Kramnik showed 22.f3 ♗xf3 23.♗xe6 ♘xe6 24.♖xc8 ♖xc8, but missed the intermediate 25.d7! ♖f8 26.♕d6!!, which I don't think anyone would blame him for. The line, in fact, still continues with 26...♕g5 27.♘xf3 ♕c5+ 28.♕xc5 ♘xc5 29.♖e7! ♔g8 30.♘e5, and the d-pawn will win the game.

Instead, Aronian proposed 22.f4, but the endgame after 22...♘d7! 23.♕xe6 ♕xe6 24.♗xe6 ♖xc1 25.♖xc1 ♘c5 should not be a straightforward win. It can be concluded that 21...♔h8 was definitely the best practical chance.

**22.f4** Effectively trapping the black queen. **22...♖f6 23.♖c3!**



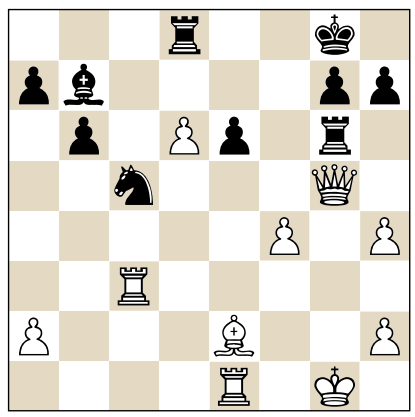
Preparing ♗e2 ♕h3 ♗f1 ♕g4 h3!, when g3 is defended.

**23...♖h6** Defending against the first threat, but there is another one.

**24.♗e2 ♕h3 25.♕g5!** With the rook blocking the h7-pawn, there is no ...h7-h6 to kick the queen.

Note that 25.♗f1 ♕g4 26.h3 ♕h5! was the point of Kramnik's 23rd move.

**25...♕xh4 26.gxh4 ♖g6**



Black makes it to an endgame, but with an exchange up and an ongoing initiative Levon had little trouble converting.

**27.♖d1 ♗d5 28.f5 ♖xg5+ 29.hxg5 ♔f8 30.fxe6 ♗xe6 31.♗c4 ♗f5 32.♖e3 g6 33.♖e7 ♖d7 34.♖de1** Black resigned. ■

# ‘Before I wanted to play well. Now I want to win.’

MARIA EMELIANOVA

**Interview** Levon Aronian

At 34, Levon Aronian thinks he has reached the fun part. ‘I feel that I have settled in life. I know what I want and I feel that I can have it.’ And who can blame him after his dashing victory in Stavanger? **DIRK JAN TEN GEUZENDAM** sat down with the buoyant Armenian (‘I am the most curious person that I know personally’) for a lively, at times philosophical talk about Magnus, Tal, Bruckner, Yerevan, San Sebastian and the other good things in life.

Sometimes you don't need to see games or results to know who is calling the tune. Just watching Levon Aronian at and off the board during Altibox Norway Chess could have convinced you that he was the domineering force here. Looking energetic and strong, fit and with a light tan, he moved around as if he was drinking in every minute. Not only did he play strong-willed and original chess that won him first prize, the Armenian was also the centre of attention when the players and others gathered in the lobby bar in the evening to relax. In the Avalon sessions, he was an elusive competitor they could not get a grip on, in the boisterous bughouse fights he was in a class of his own as the pieces flew around. Joking, provoking, teasing, pleasing and almost always having the last word.

This Levon Aronian was a far cry from the timid, often withdrawn figure who failed to impress in 2016 and even threatened to disappear from sight. Curious what made him turn the tide, we invited him for a talk after one of the finest wins in his gold-rimmed career. He accepted without hesitation, clearly happy to talk about better times.

*Norway Chess 2017 was one of the strongest tournaments of all time. Did this aspect have a special appeal for you when you came here?*
'No, not really. Most of the tournaments where Magnus plays have a special appeal. I guess that goes for almost everyone. I don't think people care so much about the others. Magnus is leading the rating list and he's been dominating the chess scene for I don't know how many years in a row, which creates a special motivation.'

*He is the touchstone.*
'Of course.'

*You win the tournament and defeat him in a beautiful game.*
'I don't have such a high opinion of that game, honestly. There are so many mistakes on both sides. It was a game that was enjoyable to play, and beating him is always nice. But I mean, I didn't play very precisely. He could have had a draw at some point. I was just too excited, as usual. I cannot play precisely and I never played precisely, that's not what I do in chess. I try to play the best I can, but I cannot really change the way I am. I mean, if I was somebody else, I would probably not take on h7. I wouldn't be so excited and would find a clearer way. And there was a clearer way. But why is that? I guess the Caucasus is the reason, that rush of blood that is constantly there. That makes you make mistakes.

**'I guess the Caucasus is the reason, that rush of blood that is constantly there.'**

At the same time, it is something that makes me look for something that isn't there. It is important to have this spark, this belief that enables you to produce something more than there is. And you also convince your opponent. If you're telling him this will work, he also starts believing that it will.'

*There is this cliché notion of chess being a mixture of sport, art and science. Was the concept in the game against Magnus the art part?*
'It's the logic part. Because I had analysed ♗c2 a long, long time ago. Then, when he played his move, I thought, if that move is good then my move doesn't make sense. So there has to be something, and this must be the reason why his move is not good. Basic logic.'

*Still, playing a game like that must make you feel a bit like an artist.*
'Absolutely.'

*Is that what you'd love to be for the outside world, an artist?*
'I am not the person to judge. We can call ourselves anything. And we love calling ourselves something we are not. But I love playing interesting moves. I love playing something sharp. And it definitely did not yield me anything good many times. I've been trying to trick my opponents and been falling for tricks myself. But in an ideal world, my best game would be coming up with an interesting idea, manoeuvring, then sacrificing something and then, in an equal struggle, winning the game. Because I had seen something that my opponent hadn't. Something creative. This would be my ideal game. My ideal game wouldn't be the ideal game for Kasparov. You know, precise preparation and very forceful play. Because I like it when there is a struggle, when there is more emotion. And more emotion is more mistakes.'

*So in this sense this game was a double victory. The concept worked, and then in this equal struggle you prevailed as well.*
'Yeah, I think it was a good game.'

*Do you like being amongst artists? Do you have artist friends?*
'Most of my friends have something to do with arts. Music or otherwise. I like creation. I like when magic is happening. That's my favourite thing. When there is something intangible in the air – you cannot feel it, but it happens and you know it's there. That's what fascinates me the most in life.'

*At the same time you are very much a player.*
'Absolutely. I like to win. I used to be the guy who was not so much about winning, but rather about having

fun, but I have changed a little bit. I started wanting to win more.'

*When you're playing bughouse, you not only want to win, you also dominate the trash talk, try to be the funniest guy at the table...*
'That's not what I am trying to be. It's not that I am competing with somebody, not at all. I am just having so much fun. I like to be part of the fun and I like it when people are enjoying the time spent. I like the company.'

*And you thrive when snappy remarks are coming to you easily...*
'Yes, that's my favourite. What I like most is immediate creation, the inspiration to find something that is spontaneous. That's what I enjoy a lot.'

*At some point you told your bughouse partner, give me a bishop, because it's mate in 9. Which turned out to be pretty close to the truth.*
'Yeah, in bughouse you normally know what mates and what doesn't. But it sounds funny, it's just fooling around.'

*I was wondering whether it was the player or the calculator in you, when in the last round of the blitz tournament, which decided on the colours in the main event, you repeated moves against Caruana. When you could have mated him. Did you see the mate?*
'Yeah. I saw it was almost mate in different ways, but then I thought... I love this story of Tal, about his game against Benko, in the last round of the Candidates' tournament in 1959, when he needed a draw (to qualify for the world title match against Botvinnik – DJtG). It's from his book, his wonderful book (translated into English as *The Life and Games of Mikhail Tal* – DJtG). He needed a draw and Benko was having a dreadful tournament. So he offered Benko a draw on move 12 and Benko, because he was a fighter, said no! So Tal got a completely winning position and forced a perpetual. And the journalists asked him, you could go into an endgame with two extra pawns, why didn't you? And he said, when I want to beat Benko, I beat him. When I want a draw, I make a draw (laughs). I always remembered this, and if it's good enough for the great player Tal, it's good enough for me. I needed a draw for the colours, I was not there to impress people with my mating skills (laughs).'

*From the champions of the past, was Tal your great example?*
'There are a lot of similarities, because he was also very curious. I've had this from childhood. I am the most curious person that I know personally. But for me in chess the most inspiring force has always been Alekhine. Because of his ability to learn constantly and to adapt. And also his fighting spirit.'

*On Norwegian television you reacted to a remark that this victory had shown that you are back with words to the effect that you didn't think you had been away. But if you look at your results in 2016, there really was a slump.*
'Yeah, I had a bad year. A key moment was the Grand Prix tournament in Sharjah, a dreadful tournament, not just chess-wise, everything-wise. I was feeling terrible, I didn't have the will to play. It was kind of a wake-up call, and I decided I had to take this seriously, otherwise there would be no fun. They asked Vishy recently, are you enjoying playing chess? And he said, yes I am enjoying it a lot, but this joy stops when you start losing. And the same happened to me. I scored minus-one in an open tournament; it was a terrible tournament. And I learned some lessons from it. I decided that I had to concentrate more on my physical state, I always have to be in top shape. I worked on my running technique, worked on my stamina. And a friend of mine, who is helping me with my chess and also managing me, he said, you train too much. So I didn't do anything for one month, just hung out with my friends. And also Arianne (his girlfriend – DJtG) and some of my other friends helped me understand where I was going.'

*At some of the tournaments where things were not going well, you sometimes walked around as if you were almost ashamed to be there. Don't notice me, please.*
'Yes. I am ashamed when I play badly.

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MARIA EMELIANOVA

**It is Levon Aronian's turn in a late-night Avalon session and the others listen: Magnus Carlsen, Peter Heine Nielsen, Vladimir Kramnik, Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, Rustam Kasimdzhanov (Caruana's second) and Fabiano Caruana.**

This is actually how it has always been. I was never ashamed to lose, but I was always ashamed to lose in a very stupid way. That's what really affects me. A feeling of guilt towards the game. It's embarrassing for me that some people will see a perfectly normal position, an interesting position that gets butchered.'

*You once told me that after you had played badly in the Candidates', you didn't go out for a while.*
'Yeah, this also happens. I just generally feel ashamed.'

*You're 34 now. What do you feel, in what phase of your life are you?*
'I think this is the fun part of life. I feel that I have settled in life. I know what I want and I feel that it's there. I can feel that I can have it. And I want to have it. I want to win tournaments. I want to win games. Before I wanted to play well. Now, no, I want to win games (laughs). I want to win because I know where I stand. When you see the goal, it's just about getting there. I was happy to win Norway Chess and play in a convincing manner, in a manner some of the best would play in, having control over my games. Feeling in control, that makes me feel very happy.'

*You said that playing in a tournament with Magnus is a challenge. I guess that he's also an inspiration.*
'Absolutely, because he is a big challenge. The same as the other guys, but they are still nowhere near to Magnus.'

*And do you still have the wish to actually challenge him for the world title?*
'I don't care about it. I don't care about challenging anybody. I just want to play. It's important to get the right attitude, that's for sure. And right now I am in a position that it's very difficult to make it to the Candidates' tournament, so I don't even think about it.'

*Almost a liberating thought?*
'Yeah. I would say so. If I deserve it, I will be there. If I don't, I won't. And I don't say I deserve it, but I'll try to deserve it. I'll take my chances.'

*It shouldn't be an obsession.*
'I want to be obsessed by every tournament. I don't want to be obsessed by a particular goal, to do well in one particular tournament. Because that has never led me anywhere. It didn't work for me.'

*Magnus is an inspiration. Does the same go for Anand and Kramnik, who are older than you are and may give you the feeling that you still have some time ahead of you?*
'Both of them, but especially Kramnik, because he's evolving constantly. That's very interesting. His play these days is better than when he was World Champion. He also found Magnus as an inspiration.'

*He also has many artist friends. Many musicians.*
'Yes, we have several things in common. But I am more of a symphonic guy and I think I listen to music more than him. That's my feeling. I think he prefers concertos more. Soloists with orchestras.'

*What's high on your playlist these days?*
'I've started listening to early Baroque. Very interesting, the vocal music. And I am still going over Bruckner, because I have realized his stature. I mean, I love his music, I am starting to understand his music. I realized what kind of big person he is. His symphonies are monumental works, and yet you feel that there is so much doubt in them. If you take the 5th symphony, for example, there are so many voices, there is constant change and constant worry in this piece. It's very difficult to listen to. Generally speaking, Bruckner symphonies are very difficult to listen to, because they are full of ideas.'

*Often religious struggles.*
'Yes, yes, and I really love it. I think that was what made me start listening to early Baroque. That music, too, is influenced by religion, obviously. Very interesting.'

*What part does that play in your life, in your thoughts?*
'I listen to music a lot when I train. It plays a big part, it inspires. I would even say that it's like a core that kind of governs many things in my life. Because it's always on my mind. Classical music is a very big part of my life. And the realization that these people did this because of... I mean, they were religious, they loved the world, they loved people, it's a fascinating thought. I think I am becoming more philosophical than before, listening to music. I am kind of envious, because of the creations of these people. What they have achieved and how dedicated they were to their goal. That's what I want to be, too. But it takes a lot of time, requires a lot of changes. I often talk to present-day composers. How do you compose something? How do you get there? What makes it good? And then you understand that they work for six, seven years on a little piece of music, because they change it so much.'

*What does your current life look like, where do you live these days?*
'I live mainly in Yerevan, and it's very enjoyable. I can meet with my friends, visit my old neighbourhood. I come from a remote part of the city, I live in the centre now, but I can easily go there. There are many advantages. First of all, Yerevan is rather small, so getting somewhere is not so difficult. Secondly, the climate is just very good. It's sunny (laughs). And life is cheap, the produce is wonderful, so many good things.'

*You still go to Berlin?*
'I go to Berlin to see my family. I still have my place, but I spend more time in Yerevan since Arianne moved there. She is a consultant and an editor of the biggest newspaper in Armenia. Yes, she learned Armenian. She speaks it very well, surprisingly, but she is a talented girl.

And I go to Spain, to San Sebastian. That's where I feel like a king. San Sebastian is a place to go to when you don't want too much exposure, yet you want to feel really good. I fell in love with the place right away when I was there for the first time, for a Spanish League match in 2005, together with Gabriel (Sargissian) and Karjakin. One evening we suddenly found ourselves in a huge storm. I'd never seen anything like this, and we were in the port. Running for shelter, we fled into a restaurant, where they gave us towels. They gave us Orujo, they gave us fresh sardines. I remember telling Sergey that he shouldn't mention the Orujo to his parents, because he was only 15 at the time (laughs). That warm welcome was good enough for me to fall in love with the city, and a couple of years ago I bought an apartment overviewing the bay.'

*When you were going through difficult times in 2016, did you ever lose your appetite for the game?*
'No, never. Because even in the worst tournaments there would be games that offered some hope. I always kept my passion for the game. I am ready to fight. Nobody said it was going to be easy. Equalizing with black is tough, obtaining an advantage with white even tougher. If you look at it from a logical point of view, playing chess doesn't make any sense, but people make it happen. People search and people believe, and that's what I do as well.' ■

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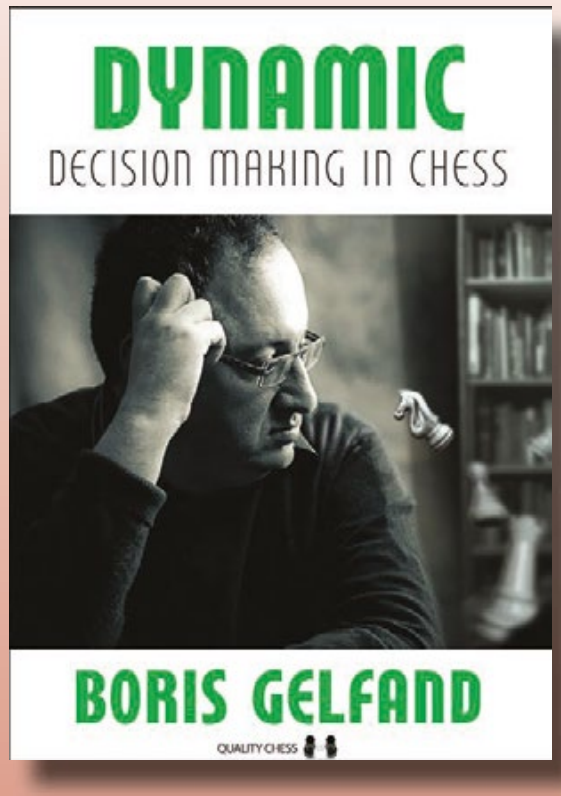


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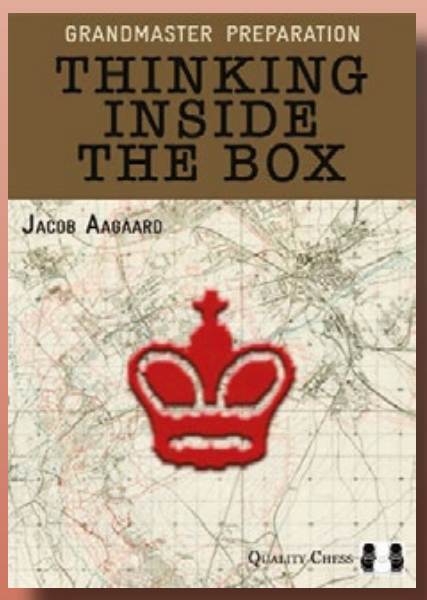


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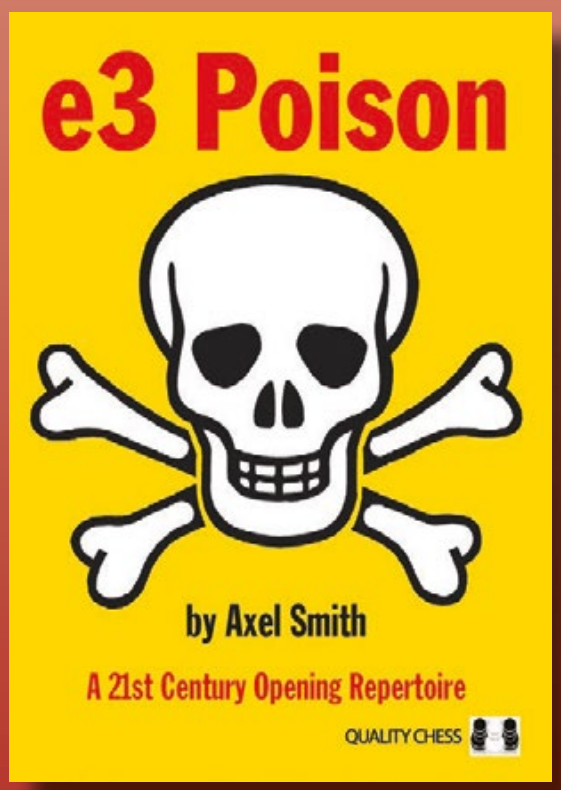


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Judit Polgar

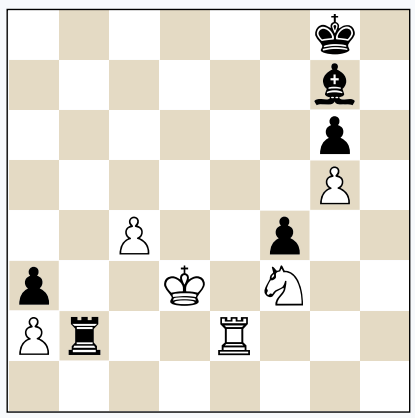
# A reliable force on Board One

Looking back on her time as team captain, **JUDIT POLGAR** speaks about Peter Leko, one of the strongest Hungarian grandmasters of all time.

For several years, Peter Leko was one of the world's best and also the strongest Hungarian player. He reached the peak of his career in 2004, when he came close to defeating Vladimir Kramnik in the World Championship match in Brissago. There are good reasons to consider Lajos Portisch the most significant Hungarian player ever, as he belonged to the very top for several decades. However, unlike Leko, he never qualified for a world title match.

But even before 2004 Peter was a formidable player, as can be inferred from the next game, in which he missed a win against the highest rated player at the time.

**Peter Leko**
**Garry Kasparov**
Bled Olympiad 2002



position after 47.c4

The match was not going the Russian team's way, since Svidler, on the last board, had blundered against Ruck in a better position and lost. As Almasi and I had drawn with Khalifman and Grischuk respectively, Kasparov was left to save the team's honour. But Leko had controlled the middle-game Sicilian complications quite well, and in the endgame his knight is by no means weaker than the bishop, since it safely blocks the f4-pawn and can dream of winning the g6-pawn.

It is easy to imagine both teams gathering around the game and following its course with great excitement.

**47...♔f7?**

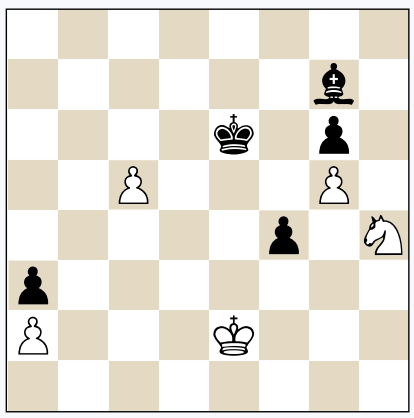
A careless move, allowing the c-pawn to advance.

47...♗f8 would have maintained approximate equality, as neither player could make progress.

**48.c5 ♖xe2**

Black needs to release the tension in order to centralize his king.

**49.♔xe2 ♔e6 50.♘h4**



**50...♗f8?**

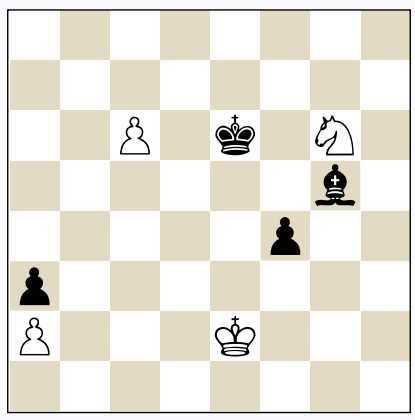
This should have been the decisive mistake. It is understandable that Kasparov avoided 50...♔d5 51.♘xg6 ♔xc5 52.♘xf4, since it is not easy to evaluate the position correctly over the board. In fact, after 52...♗e5 53.♘h5 ♔d6 54.g6 ♔e7 the game should end in a draw with a minimum of black accuracy.

With his last move Kasparov aimed (and eventually managed) to keep material equality. I should mention that even though each player had received 15 additional minutes after move 40, at this point they were already living on the 30-second increments.

**51.c6 ♗e7**

51...♔d6 wouldn't have helped: 52.♘xg6 ♗g7 53.♘xf4 ♔xc6 54.♘e6 ♗e5 55.g6 wins the bishop.

**52.♘xg6 ♗xg5**



I was watching the game next to Grischuk, and at this point I whispered to him '♘f8!'. Grischuk had seen it, too, but quickly put his finger on his lips to signal that I should keep silent.

**53.♘e5?**

The winning line goes: 53.♘f8+! ♔d6 54.c7 ♔xc7 55.♘e6+, winning the bishop and the f-pawn.

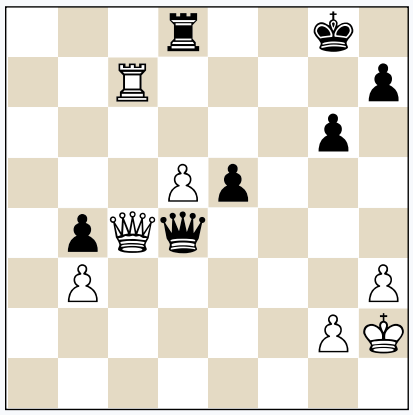
**53...♗d8 54.♘c4 ♔d5** Draw.

Leko had a critical year in 2010, and after the Khanty-Mansiysk Olympiad he even

took a whole year's break from tournament chess in an attempt to retrieve his form. When I took up the job of Hungarian team captain before the Reykjavik 2015 European Team Championship, Leko was still far from his best form, but there was no doubt in my mind about him playing on Board 1. His experience and stability at the highest level strongly recommended him for this part, and all through the championship the rest of the team was confident knowing that nothing could really go wrong on the top board. Leko had also earned the respect of his colleagues in another way. In different periods of his career he had worked together with Almasi, Berkes and Balogh, which was doubtlessly beneficial to each of them.

It's true that Leko started with a defeat, but he came back with a fine win in Round 2.

**Peter Leko**
**Tomi Nybäck**
Reykjavik European Teams 2015



position after 45...♕d4

I would define Leko's style as positional, with a subtle feel for maintaining both the initiative and the tension with each move. But at this point of the game I had resigned myself to the thought that the game would end in a draw, since the exchange of the d5- and b4-pawns looks imminent.

**46.♖b7!!**

This typical 'Leko move' is reminiscent of my 27.♕f6 against Fressinet from my previous column (New In Chess 2017/4). It is hard to spot by someone who is not sitting at the board.

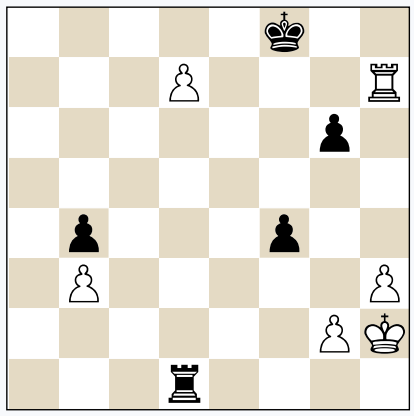
The immediate threat is 47.♕c7, and if 47...♕f4+ 48.♔g1 ♕e3+ 49.♔h1! ♕e1+ 50.♔h2, the checks run out.

**46...♕f4+** The pawn is off-limits, the most subtle point being that 46...♕xd5 loses to 47.♖b8. And if 46...♖xd5, there is 47.♕c8+ ♖d8 48.♕e6+, with a mating attack.

**47.♔h1 ♖a8**

The only attempt at counterplay, yielding White 'only' a winning rook ending.

**48.d6+ ♔f8 49.♕xf4+ exf4 50.♖xh7 ♖a1+ 51.♔h2 ♖d1 52.d7**



Paralysing the king and tying up the rook in defending the d-file.

**52...g5** 52...♔g8 53.♖e7 is curtains.

**53.h4! g4** 53...gxh4 54.♔h3 also wins.

**54.h5 ♖d2 55.d8♕+** After the rook exchange the h-pawn will be outside the black king's range. 1-0.

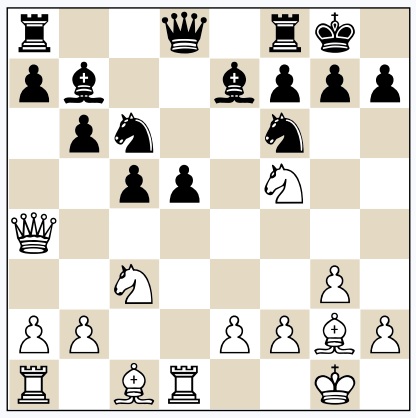
A captain needs to know the body language of his/her players and be able to read their time management. In Leko's case, there were several games in Reykjavik in which he did not seem very confident, which resulted in frequent time-troubles. But in the next game I soon realized that he knew what he was doing.

**'I would define Leko's style as positional, with a subtle feel for maintaining both the initiative and the tension with each move.'**

**Radoslaw Wojtaszek**
**Peter Leko**
Reykjavik European Teams 2015
Queen's Indian, Nimzowitsch Variation

**1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 b6 4.g3 ♗a6 5.♕c2** This relatively new line, involving a pawn sacrifice for the initiative, has been giving Black a hard time for more than a decade.

**5...c5 6.d5 exd5 7.cxd5 ♗b7 8.♗g2 ♘xd5 9.0-0 ♘c6 10.♖d1 ♗e7 11.♕a4 ♘f6 12.♘h4 0-0 13.♘f5 d5 14.♘c3**



White has obvious compensation for the pawn in view of his activity. Black cannot keep his extra pawn for too long and the best way of returning it is:

**14...♘d4!** Forcing White to exchange his active knight.

**15.♘xd4 cxd4 16.♖xd4 ♗c5 17.♖d3** This is a non-typical version of the isolani. White was too late to block the d5-pawn with his knight. Instead he simply threatens to increase the pressure against it and grab it!

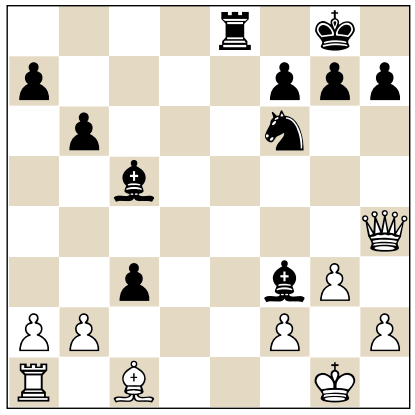
**17...♕e8 18.♕h4** All these moves were played relatively fast and, without knowing the theory myself, Leko's confident look convinced me that he had analysed the position thoroughly.

**18...♗a6** Only this is a new move, planning a series of sacrifices.

**19.♖d1 d4 20.♗xa8 dxc3 21.♗f3** If the forced line had stopped here, Black would not have had enough compensation for the exchange. But the second sacrifice brings him closer to a fortress.

**21...♗xe2 22.♖e1 ♗xf3 23.♖xe8 ♖xe8** Black has only two pieces for the queen but the mating threats, combined with the presence of a (still alive)

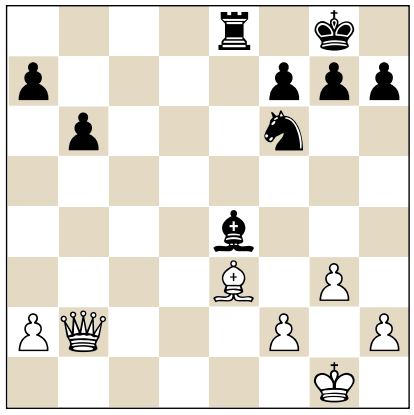
advanced pawn prevent White from stabilizing.



**24.♗e3!** The only viable way to parry the mate, for if 24.♔f1?, then 24...♖d8 25.♗e3 cxb2 26.♖b1 ♖d1+ 27.♖xd1 ♗xd1, and the b-pawn queens.

**24...cxb2 25.♖b1 ♗a3** The engines are sceptical as regards this move, preferring 25...♖d8, which they assess as equal. While this may be true, Leko's choice shows that when he analysed this line, he used his human understanding more than the computer's thinking.

**26.♕a4 ♗e4 27.♕xa3 ♗xb1 28.♕xb2 ♗e4**



The material is approximately equal and Black keeps some back-rank threats. White's next move is the only way to spoil Black's position.

**29.♗d4 ♗d5 30.f3** If 30.♔f1?! ♘g4, White loses the h2-pawn, since 31.h3? ♘h2+ 32.♔g1 ♖e1 mates.

30.♕c1 ♗xa2 eliminates the last queenside pawn and leads to an obvious draw, while 30.♕b1 ♘e4 offers Black counterplay.

**30...♗xf3 31.♗xf6 gxf6 32.♕xf6 ♗e4**

White has achieved all he could after Black's queen sacrifice, but it still is not enough. One of Black's possible defensive plans is ...♖e6, followed by ...a7-a5, when White has no way of breaking the fortress. Possibly fearing that Black would create a passed queenside pawn in the long run, Wojtaszek decided to force a draw by perpetual check.

**33.♕g5+ ♔f8 34.♕h6+ ♔g8 35.♕g5+ ♔f8 36.♕h6+ ♔g8 37.♕g5+** Draw.

Leko cannot have been satisfied with his overall result (4 out of 9), but his contribution was essential. It is also important to point out that he played all the rounds, giving the other players the possibility of taking rests.

But Hungary could not have achieved the bronze medals without a few punchers in the team. More about that in the next articles. ■

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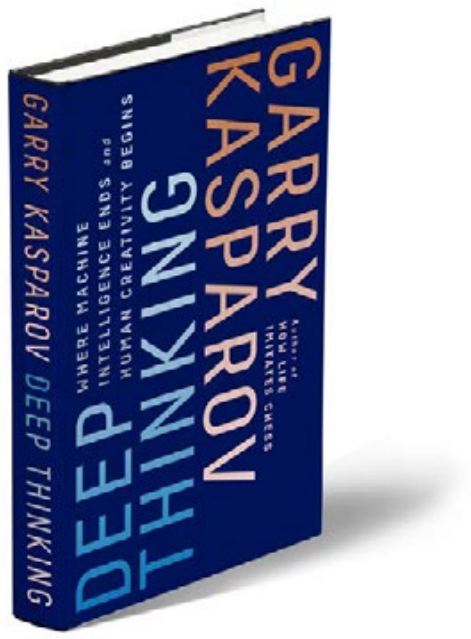
# Deep Thinking?

**Garry Kasparov has written a masterful book that inevitably invites discussion.**

With his new book *Deep Thinking*, Garry Kasparov returns to his epic matches with super-computer Deep Blue and looks at the future of Artificial Intelligence. In an enthralling and thought-provoking review, **JONATHAN ROWSON** emphasises the book's achievement ('It's extremely good'), but also asks some pertinent questions.




Every chess player has some kind of relationship with Garry Kasparov and most of them are based on projection. His world of eager global communication, relentless achievement and world historical drama is not ours, but we are implicated. He tacitly represents chess players, so naturally we imagine all sorts of things about him that are really about us.

Intentionally or not, Kasparov seems to invite projective identification. The American Mythologist Joseph Campbell suggested we should all ask ourselves the question: 'Which myth are you living by?' I imagine Kasparov would answer with the myth of the heroic quest – of roads travelled, enemies conquered, challenges overcome, and an example for others to follow. His early autobiography (1987) *Child of Change*, co-written with Donald Trelford, certainly suggests that. He describes qualifying to play Karpov by defeating Beliavsky, Kortchnoi and Smyslov in candidates matches as follows:

'In the USSR there is a fairy-tale monster called Kaschai Immortal, who hides deep in his kingdom and sends out his emissaries to kill off all invaders. If this fails, he sends out more... Only as a very last resort, when his kingdom is seriously at risk, does Kaschai deign to come down from his castle and fight the intruder himself. It is like the mythical black riders sent by Sauron in *The Lord of the Rings*. The hero has to go through many fights before he meets the super-super-creature of extraordinary strength. Only by winning one victory after another can he face that battle and still hope to stand... I knew by now I had entered his homeland... I had felt the brute force of my enemy's power, but I had yet to see his face. A confrontation could not be long delayed.'

Is he talking about chess? Yes, and beautifully so. This turbulent passion lives on in the writing three decades later in *Deep Thinking*, where Mig Greengard helps give

voice to Kasparov's thoughts as only he – an 'aide-de-camp' for almost two decades – can. The resulting voice is credible and compelling, and the pages turn easily. Just as we admire, for instance, President Obama's speeches while knowing somebody else drafted parts of them before they were signed off, you can sense the voice of *Deep Thinking* is Kasparov's by comparing it to how he speaks. Mig may be the writer, but Kasparov is definitely the author.

Trusting the authenticity of the author's voice is important because what Kasparov's unique intensity brought to the chess world was not just moves but *meaning*. The psychotherapist Carl Rogers famously said that 'What is most personal is most universal.' In that sense chess is deeply personal, and *because of that* it's much more than personal too. By sublimating the perennial human struggles of all of us, Kasparov's chess career communicated symbolically, culturally, scientifically, artistically and politically. As writer Martin Amis put it: 'Chess is his amplitude, not his trap.'

While chess appears to be game of *logos* – the scientific application of reason, for Kasparov chess moves always seem to be part of a deeper story of meaningful personal unfolding in historical context. Chess has certainly lost some *mythos* since Kasparov's retirement – something I was reminded of while reading *Deep Thinking*.

The book is generally excellent and it is tempting to just gush away with evocative quotes from every chapter. For instance, 'As a believer in chess as a form of psychological, not just intellectual warfare, playing against something with no psyche was troubling from the start.' Or 'It's not enough to know the best moves, you must also know why those moves are the best.' But rather than gush away, I would rather say: read the book – it's extremely good.

ROSA DE LAS NIEVES

**The second match between Garry Kasparov and Deep Blue in 1997 in New York attracted a worldwide audience. There was a pervasive feeling that humanity's honour was at stake.**

Instead, since Kasparov is renowned for permanently wanting to improve himself through new challenges I'm going to use a provocative analogy to help. I would say the book is like the 1996 version of Deep Blue that Kasparov defeated in Philadelphia, not the much stronger version in 1997 that defeated him in New York. I'm going to try to focus on what, to my mind, this 2700 or so book needed to get to 2850 and beyond.

In outline: First, the welcome admission that IBM didn't cheat is undermined by lingering resentment. Secondly, some feelings are generously shared, but others are conspicuous by their absence. Third, the cultural analysis of artificial intelligence tries to be balanced but ultimately comes across as naïvely optimistic. Fourth, although the material hangs together well, there was scope for a richer integration of the implicit political views and the explicit historical reflection.

But first let me emphasise the book's achievement. The inactive Grandmaster in me felt nostalgic for chess when reading the drama of the human encounters with machines – these are all great stories, elegantly told. The narrative arc follows Kasparov's early fascination and preparation with computers, his exhibition games where he defeats them easily, all the way towards his eventual loss to Deep Blue in 1997 – the climax of the book. There are also reflections on subsequent advanced chess matches with humans and

Dr **Jonathan Rowson** is a Grandmaster from Scotland and three-time British Chess Champion. He is the author of *The Seven Deadly Chess Sins* and *Chess for Zebras* and currently finishing a book on what chess taught him about being human, written for a general audience. He wrote 50 review columns for New In Chess from 2004-2010. He has degrees from Bristol, Harvard and Oxford in a range of disciplines and since 2009 has published widely in public policy research as an applied philosopher. He has a special interest in climate change and is co-founder and Director of Perspectiva, a research institute in London that examines complex global challenges by integrating perspectives from systems, souls and society. He was recently awarded an Open Society Fellowship. He tweets @Jonathan.rowson.

computers cooperating as a metaphor for the wider story of cooperation Kasparov advocates. At every stage the technical aspects of this evolution are lucidly described – I learnt a lot, and there are discerning reflections on artificial intelligence in general.

I was always ready for the next chapter and felt the introduction and first chapter were particularly good. You don't get that sustained luminous and cliché-free clarity about the place of chess in history and culture without laboriously going through several drafts. As American poet John Ciardi famously put it, 'spontaneous is what you get after the 17th draft.' There is real effort and artistry here.

Kasparov is also typically open and candid, and there is a new level of maturity. I particularly enjoyed his emphatic confession at the start of chapter seven:

'I am a sore loser. I want to clear that up right at the start. I hate losing. I hated losing bad games and I hated losing good ones. I hated losing to weak players and I hated losing to world champions. I have had sleepless nights after losses. I have had angry outbursts at award ceremonies after a bad defeat. I have been annoyed to discover that I missed a good move in a game I lost twenty years ago when analysing it for this book. I hate to lose, and not just at chess... Being a sore loser is not the attribute I am most proud of, nor am I ashamed of it. To be the best in any competitive endeavour you have to hate losing more than you are afraid of it.'

## Cheating?

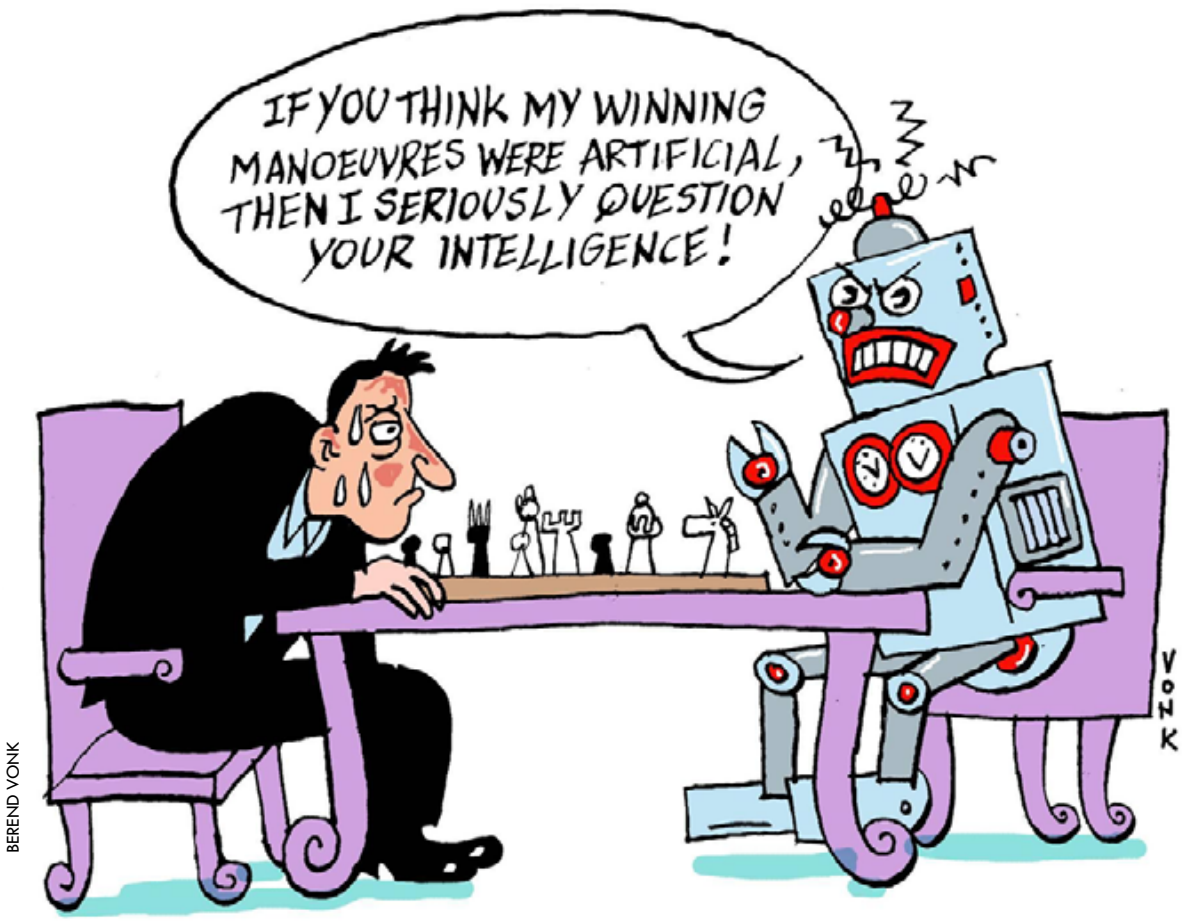
However, while he has grown in some ways he is clearly struggling to let go of the consoling narrative that his loss was somehow unjust – he is still subject to that. At the end of chapter ten, he concedes, albeit quite grudgingly, that IBM did not cheat as such in 1997:

'I have been asked, "Did Deep Blue cheat?" more times that I could possibly count, and my honest answer has always been "I don't know." After twenty years of soul-searching, revelations, and analysis, my answer is now "no". As for IBM, I believe the lengths they went to win were a betrayal of fair competition, but that the real victim of this betrayal was science.'

Leaving the idealisation of science to one side, I wanted to feel a sense of shared relief at this stage of the story: Ah, he's let it go! He's come through the stages of grief helpfully described in the book; denial, anger, negotiation, depression and, finally, acceptance. But no, I couldn't feel this because his admission that IBM didn't cheat doesn't square comfortably with a revelation elsewhere in the book that IBM's team asked to change Kasparov's bodyguard to someone who spoke Russian during the match.

**'Kasparov is also typically open and candid, and there is a new level of maturity.'**

This claim is connected to a 2009 interview with Miguel Illescas in this magazine where he also said the IBM team only entered the details of how to respond to the dodgy line of the Caro-Kann Kasparov chose, on the very morning of the final game. For those who don't recall, the opening moves were 1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 dxe4 4.♘xe4 ♘d7 5.♘g5 ♘gf6 6.♗d3 e6 7.♘gf3 h6?. Kasparov was relying on the fact that the knight sacrifice 8.♘xe6! is very strong but wouldn't be chosen because it doesn't lead directly to mate and was too long-term intuitive in appeal, even for the strongest computer in the world at the time. He was hoping for a meek retreat which would give him easy equality. On Kasparov's account, this act of subterfuge was critical: 'I will not repeat here the stream of profanities in Russian, English and languages not yet invented... Two paragraphs




BEREND VONK

after Illescas says IBM had hired Russian speakers to spy on me, he says his team entered this critical line into Deep Blue's book that morning? An obscure variation that I had only discussed with my team in the privacy of our suite at the Plaza Hotel that week in New York?'

My impression is that Joel Benjamin's much less controversial version of events is more credible: the response to 7...h6? was already programmed before the match.

What bothers me is this. *If* IBM did seek out a Russian speaking bodyguard to stealthily report back on Kasparov's preparation and *if* they used that information to win the match then ipso facto they cheated.

But here's the thing. They almost certainly did nothing of the kind. What is pertinent in the context of *Deep Thinking* is that Kasparov still seems to *want* to believe the Illescas version – he still seems attached to an intangible grievance. Kasparov says IBM could resolve the apparent disparity by 'showing the printouts', but haven't we moved beyond that 20-year-old request?

Miguel Illescas:
'That very morning we told Deep Blue: if Garry plays h6, take on e6 and don't check the database. Just play, don't think.'
Barely have we crossed the threshold of La Lonja or the chef of this specialty restaurant in central Barcelona appears from the kitchen to embrace Miguel Illescas. The two men exchange cordialities, stress-
June 2009: Miguel Illescas with his wife Olga and their 10-month-old daughter Diana on a Barcelona outside terrace.

**The 2009 New In Chess interview with Miguel Illescas that highly upset Garry Kasparov: 'I will not repeat here the stream of profanities in Russian, English and languages not yet invented…'**

## Feelings

Kasparov's mother Klara features as an enigmatic character we are allowed to know *of*, but not really *about*. For instance on page 133:

'My mother, Klara, also attended, making sure all the conditions were correct in the playing hall, and was always seated in the front row.'

This apparently insipid factual statement jumped out at me for what it doesn't say. Clearly a huge psychological weight is being carried by his mother on his behalf. We also hear only passing references to family relationships more generally.

It is of course the author's prerogative to keep his personal life private, but given Kasparov's emotional candour elsewhere and his role as a representative of humanity as such, I felt something was missing. In *Child of Change* he describes a moment where as a young boy he took a photograph of his late father into school to signify that he was ready to talk about him, but there is nothing of comparable affective poignancy in *Deep Thinking*. We hear a lot about the agonies of the ego, but little about the fragility of the self.

Later in the book when he speaks of being human as being more than merely being creative I thought of these missed opportunities. Kasparov presumably loves and depends on people as we all do, but we are not given access to that side of the story.

## Ideology

I don't know Kasparov's politics in depth, but from his *Wall Street Journal* writings and some speeches he comes across as broadly neoliberal – a term defined by Sociologist Will Davies as 'the state-led remodelling of society around the model of the market'. Kasparov's defining experience of the transition from communism to capitalism seems to have crystallised a view of human freedom defined largely by governments getting out of the way.

The implicit default model of the human being in *Deep Thinking* is therefore not a social worker keeping a family afloat, an inner-city teacher inspiring a generation, a climate campaigner fighting for ecological sanity or a nurse caring for the sick. It's an individual competing for survival.

If you are an ambassador for humanity in the encounter between humans and machines, your implicit political view of the human being matters. My most fundamental concern with Deep Thinking is therefore broadly about its tacit ideology.

These days I work in public policy research as an applied philosopher. Over the last few years I have been funded by trusts and foundations to examine the relationship between complex global challenges and the inner lives of human beings, highlighting how this plays out in society; for instance I look at how our denial of death informs our approach to climate change or how alienation shapes our attitude to human rights.

From my professional vantage point I was drawn to the promise of the subtitle: *Deep Thinking: Where machine intelligence ends and human creativity begins.*

AI doesn't come by itself. It's not just that it co-arises with synthetic biology, robotics, virtual reality, 3D printing and so forth. AI also arises in a world with acute ecological constraints, enduring economic instability, and democratic stress, and we need to relate to it in that context. So we need human creativity, yes, but I don't think we can take refuge in nebulous self-expression. The book doesn't say we can, but it doesn't really grapple with different kinds of creativity either, nor with the limitations of intelligence.

In light of the juxtaposition in the subtitle, a reference to Oxford Physicist David Deutsch's 2012 essay in *Aeon magazine* on why AI has mostly failed would have helped make the point about creativity less generic. Deutsch defines creativity as the ability to create new explanations, which is precisely what AI can't yet do, and may never be able to do. In a protean world of interconnected and increasingly complex phenomena we need that kind of creativity more than we need problem solving ability modelled on bounded systems with fixed rules like chess, or even Go. Perhaps one can lead to the other?

*Deep Thinking* mentions the recent victory of Alpha Go over the Go World Champion Lee Sodol, where Deep Mind's formidable learning system created a data-driven self-improving evaluative function. This was a qualitatively different kind of artificial intelligence and showed transferable powers of computation. Deep Mind's CEO Demis Hassabis (a former chess prodigy) speaks of AI as a 'meta-solution': 'First, solve intelligence. Then use intelligence to solve everything else.'

But again, is this really the kind of breakthrough we most need? I'm not sure the idea of solving intelligence even makes sense, and I'm not sure intelligence is what we most need in any case.

In different ways, Kasparov and Hassabis both seem susceptible to 'solutionism', namely the notion that all problems can ultimately be solved with intelligence and technology. But within any complex system solutions will create new problems or surface old ones. As the filmmaker Nora Bateson puts it: 'The trouble with problem solving is the idea that a solution is an end point.'

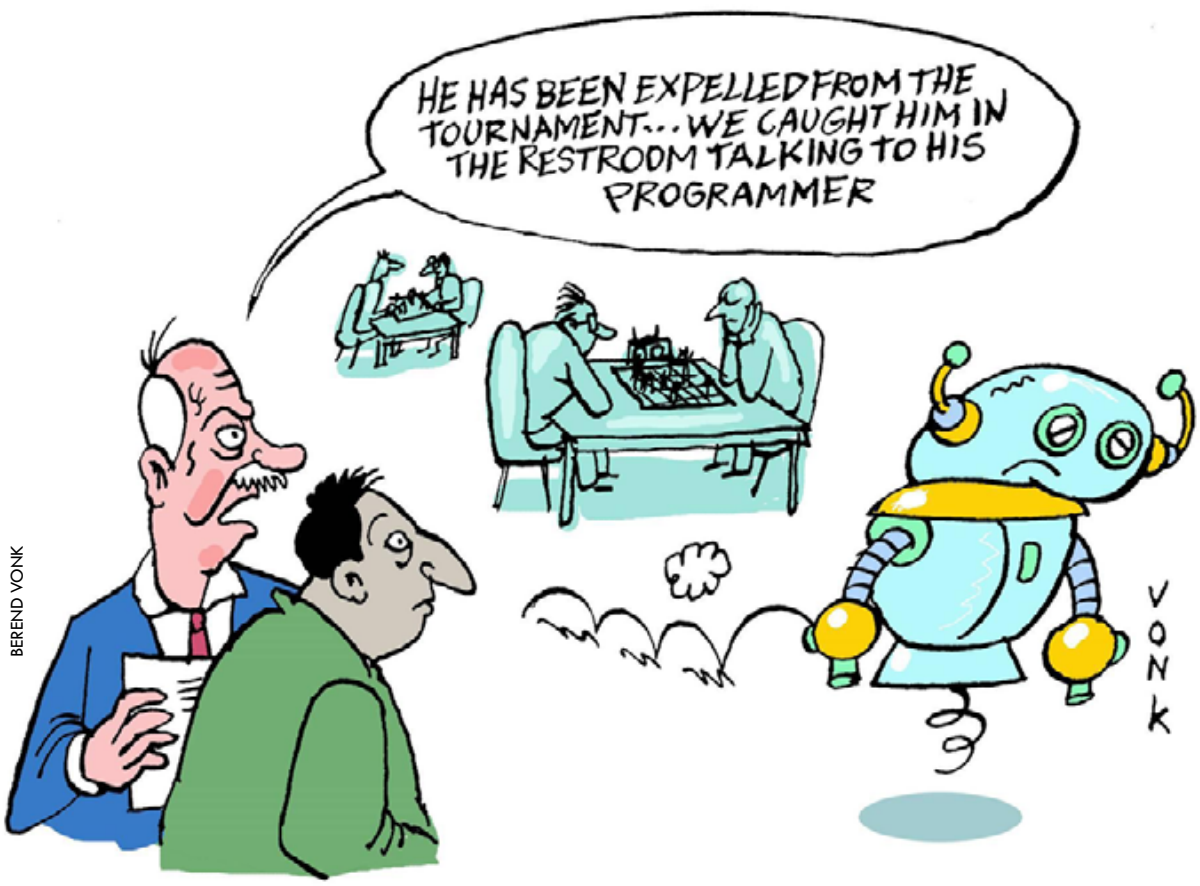
It would therefore have been good to push the sceptical arguments a little harder, for instance by referencing Silicon Valley's heretic Jaron Lanier, who claims that genuine AI doesn't yet even exist.

The AI systems that we venerate always aggregate human data and expertise in ways that goes mostly unacknowledged, partly because we don't have yet good micro-payment systems to financially reward people for their efforts. For example, automatic translation software updates itself with recent human translations of new terms to remain effective, but don't pay them for it. Whatever AI is – and it might just be a research funding category – it now exists in the context of 'surveillance capitalism' in which data, power and profit are increasingly the same thing.

With Deep Blue, IBM assumed instrumental private ownership of a body of knowledge and understanding that was arguably our collective inheritance, and Deep Mind is now doing something similar. The more you look at technology, the more political it becomes.

## Integration

The narrative crescendo moves towards its finale with the following remark: 'Our algorithms will continue to get smarter and our hardware faster. Machines gradually improve at a given task to the point where they no longer benefit from human partnership, the way elevators outgrew their operators. This is the way it goes, and will continue to go if we are lucky enough to enjoy a continued stream of technological advances. I assume we will, and this is very good news because the alternative is stagnation and declining living standards. To keep ahead of the machines, we must not try to slow them down because that slows



us down as well. We must speed them up. We must give them, and ourselves, plenty of room to grow. We must go forward, outward and upward.'

Forgive me, is this more than vacuous cheerleading? The statement is laced with ideology, hidden assumptions and naïve optimism.

The problem is not just millions of workers losing their jobs to robots without ever knowing which way is 'forward' or 'outward' or 'upward' – although we probably need more than a universal basic income to deal with that. The deeper problem is that Kasparov has not connected his enthusiasm for the work of Daniel Kahneman and Dan Ariely on human automaticity and irrationality mentioned elsewhere in the book with our vulnerability to technological change.

Alas, in the early 21st century we are not empowered citizens consciously and rationally choosing how to shape the world through our *Demos*. Mostly we are habitual consumers of, for instance, Google, Amazon, Facebook and YouTube, where algorithms about our choices are mined by digital advertisers.

Such platforms and corporations may not be malevolent, but if the economic system is driven by novelty and profit alone, they will continue to shape the world by monetising our attention. They know – because behavioural scientists tell them – which of our emotional and status-seeking buttons to press to get us to look at some things and not others, and then scroll, or press or buy, or vote a particular way. And unless we adapt psychologically and politically we will mostly – dare I say it? – be pawns in someone else's game. In other words, not free at all.

This point leads to the final exquisite irony. Kasparov's enthusiasm for embracing technological change seems genuine, but also blinkered. The key factor in his assessment surely should be the same key factor that determined the outcome of his match with Deep Blue in 1997. Throughout the book, Kasparov shares his disappointment that IBM simply wanted to win to increase their stock price rather than pursue a shared scientific encounter. That, there, is the political front line. We have mostly thought of this match as a battle between human and machine, but the deeper, more consequential struggle of the match was the battle between public good and commercial interest, which are by no means always aligned.

ROSA DE LAS NIEVES

**New York, May 11, 1997. The opening gamble in Game 6 has led to disaster. After a mere 18 moves Garry Kasparov's position is totally lost and of course he knows it.**

**'We have mostly thought of this match as a battle between human and machine, but the deeper, more consequential struggle of the match was the battle between public good and commercial interest.'**

I now wonder if the reason Kasparov can't fully let go of the notion he was mistreated in the 1997 match is because facing the fuller truth would require a painful ideological adjustment. Indeed, the main lesson humanity needs to learn from the Deep Blue match in 1997 might be the one Kasparov does not seem to have learnt: corporations are not our friends.

What matters most for humanity's future is not whether a technological development is interesting. What really matters is: who owns this technology, what do they want to do with it, and how will we respond for the greater good?

We don't have to be fatalistic or pessimistic about that question, but we need extraordinary political courage and paradigmatic insight to answer it properly. If technology is going to be a humanising tool and not a dehumanising threat, we are going to need some very deep thinking indeed. ■

# Grand Chess Tour de France

## Magnus Carlsen defeats MVL in tiebreak to claim first leg

At the outset of the final day in the Canal+ studios in Paris, no one doubted that Magnus Carlsen was headed for victory. But as the World Champion slumped, local hero Maxime Vachier-Lagrave went on the rampage and caught up with him. In the ensuing tiebreak, the Norwegian proved, not for the first time in his career, that you should never give him a second chance. An on-the-spot report by **YANNICK PELLETIER**.

LENNART OOTES

**The 2017 Grand Chess Tour kicked off with the Paris leg in the studios of Canal+.**

The 2017 Grand Chess Tour started with a rapid and blitz event in Paris. Compared to last year, a few adjustments had been made. Originally, the organizers had expressed the desire to increase the number of classical tournaments from two, in St. Louis and London, to three, but in the end only another rapid/blitz event was added in St. Louis in August, immediately after the Sinquefield Cup. They also introduced their new rating, the Universal Rating System, combining all time-controls, which is certainly an interesting idea, but I am not sure if it will be widely accepted. Indeed, the rating system is one of the things FIDE has been doing well for quite a while.

Another novelty caused more confusion among the players, arbiters and commentators: the replacement of the usual increment by the 'delay'. But we'll get to that later.

The Paris organizers again tried to stage the tournament at the Maison de la Chimie, as this international convention centre in the heart of the city had proven almost ideal last year. Unfortunately, this venue had already been booked. Unable to find a location that was both available and affordable, they decided to run the five-day event at the studios of Canal+, the French TV channel that is part of co-sponsor Vivendi, a huge mass-media group based in Paris. The opening ceremony took place at the Vivendi head office, where the guests had a stunning view of both the Arc de Triomphe and the Eiffel Tower from the rooftop terrace! There was a sumptuous buffet and a Pro-Am tournament full of action and emotion. Not all grandmasters were in harmony with their less experienced partners when they alternated moves and not always understood what the other's plans were. I was particularly impressed by Magnus Carlsen's attitude: he encouraged his partner, Vivendi CEO Stéphane Roussel, after each good move he made, while remaining totally composed after his mistakes. The most prominent guest was one of those famous Frenchmen with two names: Dominique Strauss-Kahn, aka DSK. It is said that the former Minister and Director of the IMF has got some chess talent, but it is unlikely that he would feel fully at ease in the chess world. Just not enough women.

The only real controversial point about having the tournament in the studios of Canal+ was the absence of a physical audience. There was

not even enough space to allow VIP guests to the set. I am sure that everyone felt a bit uneasy about it, but it was the price to pay to get chess on TV in such a professional way. Not only was the whole tournament broadcast live on Dailymotion, the French equivalent of YouTube, but Canal+ Sport also showed a one-hour recap every evening. Due to the late hour, the viewing audience was not very large, but Canal+ happily noted that the numbers kept growing from day to day.

With about 700K views – half of them on Dailymotion – Vivendi expressed the same satisfaction as last year, and there is a good chance that they will keep on covering the event next year. I ventured to ask if broadcasting other GCT legs would be an idea, but that is not likely to happen. June is one of those rare 'empty' periods in the sports calendar. All football leagues are over, while no important tourneys take place in other mainstream sports. By contrast, the calendar is over-crowded in August or December.

The French commentary team consisted of a professional sports presenter plus three chess 'experts', Almira Skripchenko, Jean-Baptiste Mullon and yours truly. The fact that Pauline Sanzey knew nothing about chess actually gave some pleasant dynamism to the show. We had been instructed to keep things at the most basic level, with the aim of also attracting non-chess players to the broadcasts.

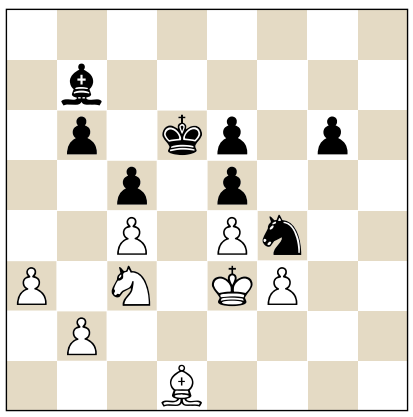
While laying out the format of the Grand Chess Tour and its specific rules for the audience, we definitely had a rough time explaining the concept of the 'delay'. My best effort came on Day 4, when I mumbled a 46-second description... Well, in case anyone can sum it up in just one sentence, I'm more than interested! Please send your feedback to the 'Your Move' section and I'll keep the best version for next year!

The time-control for rapid games was 25 minutes per player with a 10-second delay, and, for blitz, five minutes per player with a 3-second delay. Unlike the increment system, this set-up does not allow players to accumulate time. If a player moves within the delay period, no time is subtracted or added to his clock. For example, if you only have seven seconds left in a blitz game and move instantly, your clock stays at 7 seconds. If instead, you spend six seconds, your clock will show four seconds. The delay being a US specialty, most participants had never tried it out and Hikaru Nakamura appeared to have a definite edge. But in the end, experienced or not, almost everyone was involved in one or more accidents. Here is a small assortment of time-scramble tragedies.

**'The fact that Pauline Sanzey knew nothing about chess actually gave some pleasant dynamism to the show.'**

If 10 seconds felt like little in the rapid, the three-second delay in the blitz often led to complete madness.

**Magnus Carlsen**
**Alexander Grischuk**
Paris blitz 2017 (5)



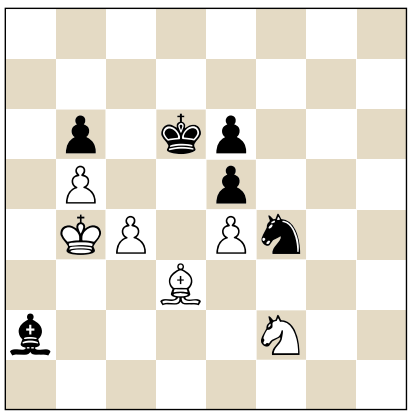
position after 50...♘f4

This endgame had been about equal for quite a while, but both players only had seconds left. I bet that a draw offer from either side might well have been accepted, but apparently they were more concerned about moving their hands than keeping a cool head.

**51.♗e2**

When playing this, Carlsen knocked down his king and pressed the clock. Grischuk took his knight... and dropped it in turn... Nobody claimed anything and the game went on.

**51...♘g2+ 52.♔f2 ♘f4 53.♗f1 ♗c6 54.b4 cxb4 55.axb4 ♗e8 56.♔e3 g5 57.b5 ♔c7 58.♘a4 ♗h5 59.♗e2 ♘g2+ 60.♔f2 ♘f4 61.♗f1 g4 62.fxg4 ♗xg4 63.♔e3 ♗d1 64.♘b2 ♗c2 65.♗d3 ♗b3 66.♔d2 ♔d6 67.♔c3 ♗a2 68.♘d1 ♔c5 69.♘f2 ♔d6 70.♔b4**

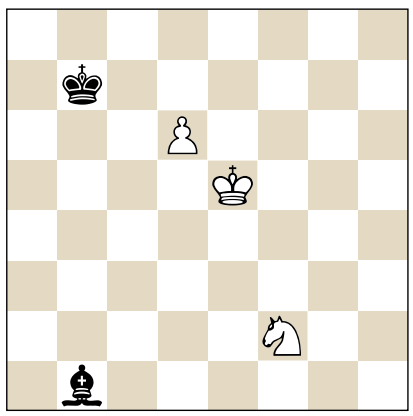


**70...♔c7?** 70...♘xd3+ 71.♘xd3 ♗b1 72.c5+ ♔c7 draws. **71.♗f1 ♔d6 72.♘d1?** Carlsen could have won the bishop with 72.♔a3 ♗b1 73.♔b2, but Grischuk could have claimed a win at several points due to Carlsen dropping pieces and pressing his clock. Personally, I don't really like this rule of claiming and getting a win in such circumstances. I even watched a video not too long ago, where this happened between two Indian grandmasters, and felt disgusted. But rules are rules, and Carlsen's obviously unintentional knocking down pieces could have

LENNART OOTES

**Garry Kasparov has a chat with Magnus Carlsen and the champ's second Peter Heine Nielsen on the rooftop terrace of the Vivendi head office with the Arc de Triomphe in the background.**

provoked a reaction by Grischuk.
**72...♗b1 73.♘f2 ♔c7 74.c5 bxc5+ 75.♔xc5 ♗c2 76.b6+ ♔b7 77.♗b5 ♗b1 78.♗c6+ ♔a6 79.b7 ♔a7 80.♔d6 ♔b8 81.♔xe5 ♘e2 82.♔xe6 ♔c7 83.♗d5 ♘c3 84.♔e5 ♘xd5 85.exd5 ♔xb7 86.d6**

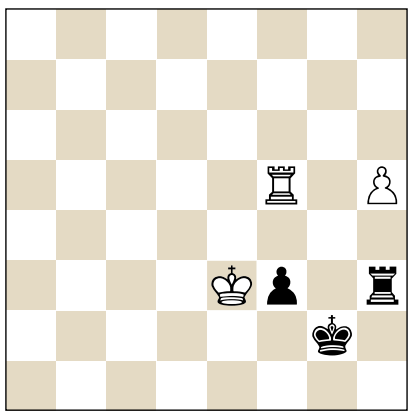


And Carlsen's flag fell. Both players turned towards the arbiter... Black can theoretically deliver mate with this material on the board, so he wins.

Everybody knows about Grischuk's addiction to time-trouble. Whether in classical games or in blitz, he loves taking his time, letting his adrenaline rise as the seconds tick away. This is when he is at his sharpest, showing incredible skills as an escape artist. Awarded a wildcard for Paris, he finished second in the rapid and 4th in the overall standings.

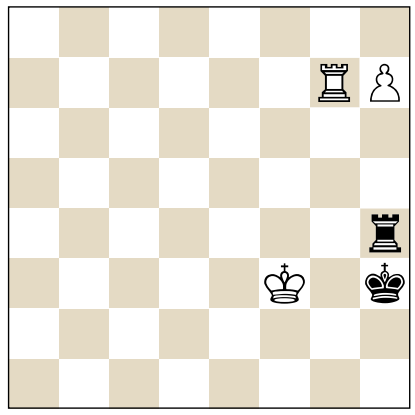
Another speed-devil, Hikaru Nakamura, played good chess the first four days, and remained close to the lead. But on the last day, his legendary blitz skills let him down and he only scored 4 out of 9. And while you're going from bad to worse, unreal things can happen.

**Shakhriyar Mamedyarov**
**Hikaru Nakamura**
Paris blitz 2017 (16)



position after 76.♔e3

Nakamura had just missed a win in this rook ending, which had been equal for a long time. He obviously understood that instantly, despite being down to his last seconds.
**76...f2+ 77.♔e2 f1♘**
Excuse me?! Well, my guess is that Nakamura decided to make a draw in a funny way instead of forcing it by queening or going 77...♖xh5.
**78.♖f2+!** Oops... **78...♔g1**
78...♔g3? loses to 79.♖f3+! ♔g4 80.♖xh3.
**79.♖xf1+ ♔g2 80.♖f2+ ♔g1 81.♖f5** This is still an elementary draw, but Nakamura had lost the thread and fails to see that he can just sit and wait with his king.
**81...♖a3 82.h6 ♖h3 83.♖f6 ♔h2 84.♔f2 ♖h4 85.♔f3 ♔h3 86.♖g6 ♖a4 87.h7 ♖h4 88.♖g7**



**88...♖h6?** It was not necessary to allow the pawn to go to h7, but after 88...♔h2 it is still impossible for White to make progress.
**89.♔f4 ♔h4** 89...♖h5 is no longer sufficient in view of 90.♖a7 ♔h4 91.♖a1. **90.♔f5 ♖h5+ 91.♔g6 ♔g4 92.♔f7+** 1-0.

Magnus Carlsen described his time management in the blitz as his biggest problem in Paris. It clearly took him out of his comfort zone and cost him many points. In fact, the only player who didn't seem to have a problem with the delay was Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, for the simple reason that he tried to avoid this final phase by all means, playing fast to keep a time cushion in most of his games. This strategy did not really pay off in the rapid games, where he sometimes played too fast in critical positions.

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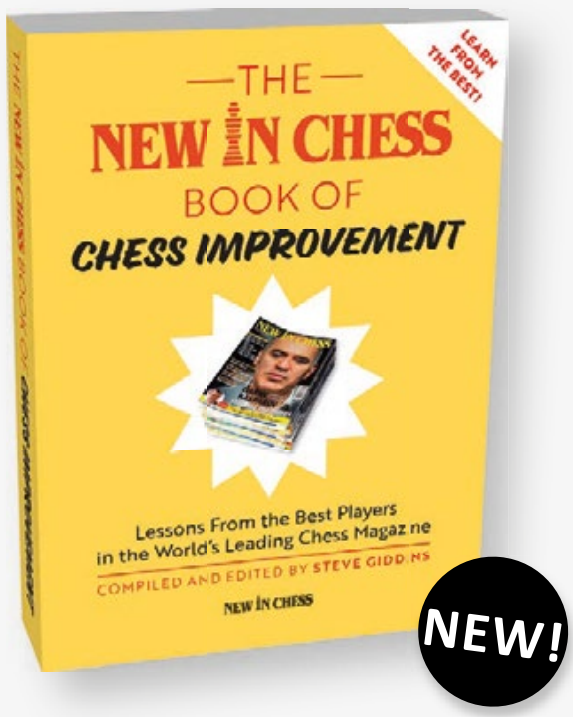


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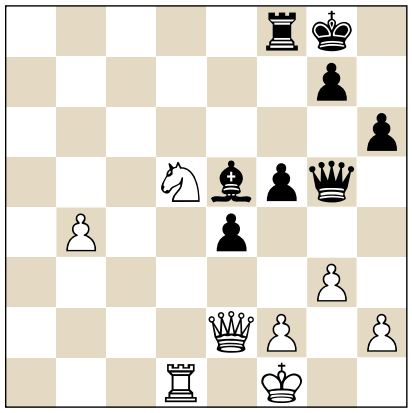
**Magnus Carlsen**
**Maxime Vachier-Lagrave**
Paris rapid 2017 (3)



position after 30.♕e2

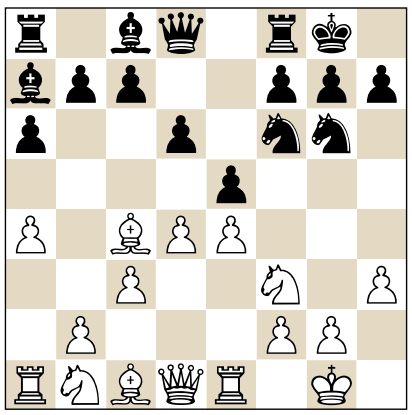
Carlsen had spent much more time than MVL to get this balanced position. After White's last move 30.♕b5-e2, MVL should have played something like 30...♗d6, with ideas like ...f5-f4. But instead, the Frenchman moved almost instantly:
**30...♔h8??** And after **31.f4** his bishop was lost, and Black resigned a few moves later.

Probably MVL's best rapid effort was his win against Nakamura. Here it is, with his own notes.

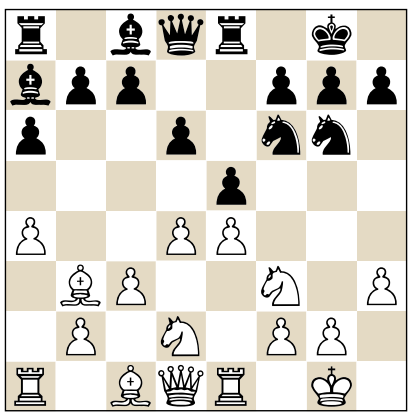
NOTES BY
**Maxime Vachier-Lagrave**

**Maxime Vachier-Lagrave**
**Hikaru Nakamura**
Paris rapid 2017 (7)
Giuoco Piano

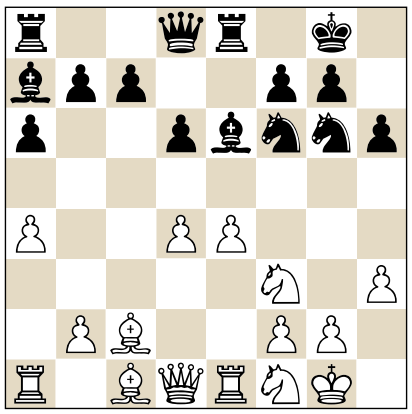
**1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗c4**
I used to be reluctant to play the Giuoco Piano, because I had the feeling that I couldn't understand all the subtleties of the opening. Then I understood that nobody did...
**3...♗c5 4.c3 ♘f6 5.d3 d6 6.0-0 a6 7.a4 0-0 8.♖e1 ♗a7 9.h3 ♘e7 10.d4 ♘g6** This is one of the tabiyas in the Italian. As is often the case, Black deliberately gives up the centre in the hope of exerting pressure there, especially on pawn e4.



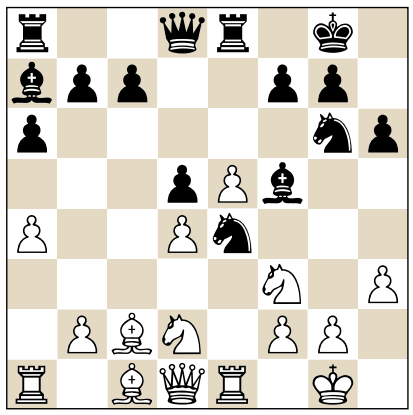
**11.♘bd2 ♖e8**
11...exd4?! 12.cxd4 d5 13.exd5 ♘xd5 14.♘e4 c6 15.♗g5 would favour White, since he now activates all his pieces before Black consolidates his grip on the d5-square.
**12.♗b3** White wants to bring his bishop to c2 to free ♘d2 from the defence of the e4-pawn.
12.♗d3 is also possible, with the same idea, but the bishop will need to go to c2 anyway, otherwise Black will be in time to equalize, e.g. after 12...h6 13.♘f1 d5!.



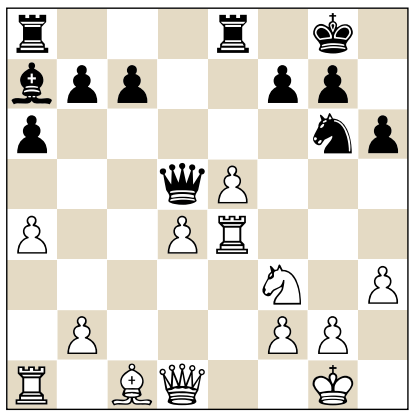
**12...♗e6** Not a move I like, since it doesn't disrupt my plan and after ♗c2 the ♗e6 is awkwardly placed.
12...♗d7 13.♗c2 ♗c6 could be a more appropriate way to fight against White's plan.
**13.♗c2 h6 14.♘f1 exd4!? 15.cxd4**



**15...d5**
Hikaru understands correctly that he needs to find active counterplay.
15...c5 16.d5 ♗d7 17.b3 would be a very sad Benoni for Black, unless he makes ... c4 work, which is unlikely for now, because the pawn would just end up weak and square on d4 could be used to good effect by White.
**16.e5 ♘e4 17.♘1d2**
17.♗e3!? ♘e7 (17...f5 18.exf6 ♕xf6 19.♘g3, with a white edge) 18.♘1d2 was also possible and maybe more appropriate to consolidate my grip on the position.
**17...♗f5!** 17...♘xd2 18.♗xd2 c5 19.dxc5 ♗xc5 would clearly be in White's favour, even though Black temporarily regains some activity.



**18.♘xe4**
The blunt 18.g4 cost me some time before I found an appropriate answer for Black with 18...♘xf2 19.♔xf2 ♗xd4+! 20.♔g2 (20.♘xd4? ♕h4+) 20...♗xc2 21.♕xc2 ♗xe5, and Black gets enough pawns for the piece.
**18...dxe4 19.♗xe4 ♗xe4 20.♖xe4 ♕d5**

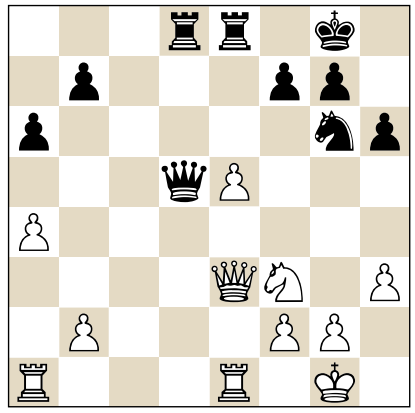


**21.♖e1?!** Allowing simplifications that favour Black.

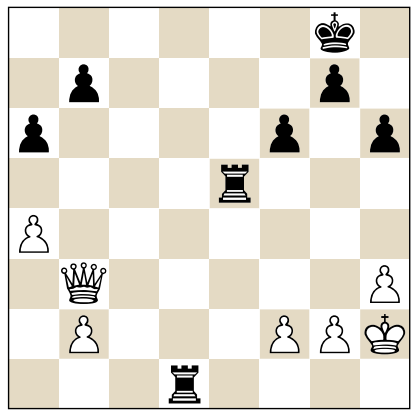
LENNART OOTES

**In the studio Maxime Vachier-Lagrave was constantly reminded that he was playing in his home city. The Parisian once again demonstrated his exceptional skills in speed chess.**

21.♕c2! c5 22.dxc5 ♗xc5 looked to me like heading for a draw, but White has an unexpected shot: 23.♖c4!. I had missed the whole idea starting from this move, because I had not expected to be able to keep my extra pawn: 23...♗a7 (23...♗f8 24.♗f4, and White would safely retain his pawn advantage), and now White uncorks the powerful 24.♗xh6! gxh6 25.♖d1 ♕a5 (25...♕e6 26.♖d6 ♕e7 27.♖c7 would win on the spot) 26.b4 ♕b6 27.♖d6 ♕xf2+ 28.♕xf2 ♗xf2+ 29.♔xf2 ♘xe5 30.♘xe5 ♖xe5 31.♖xh6, and White is technically winning.
**21...♖ad8!**
21...c5 22.dxc5 ♕xd1 23.♖xd1 ♗xc5 (23...♘xe5?! 24.♗e3) 24.♖d5 ♗b6 25.♗d2, and White keeps his extra pawn and thus his advantage.
**22.♗e3 c5 23.dxc5 ♗xc5! 24.♗xc5 ♕xc5 25.♕b3 ♕d5**
25...♘xe5 26.♘xe5 ♖xe5 27.♕xb7. and I remain a pawn up, although Hikaru would still have decent drawing chances here.
**26.♕e3** 26.♕c3 might have been the best way to keep the advantage: 26...♖c8 27.♕e3 is now more powerful, because White is now really threatening ♖ad1.



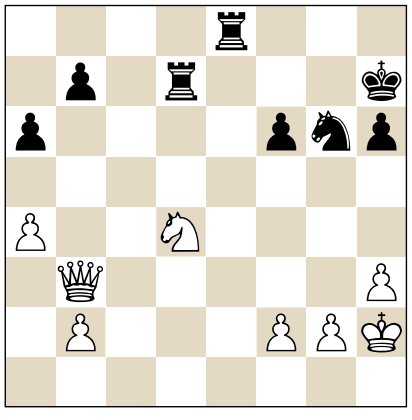
**26...f6?**
Falling into my idea.
With 26...♘xe5!, as Hikaru realized soon after, he would have kept the balance: 27.♘xe5 f6, and now my intended 28.♖ad1 (28.f4 fxe5 29.fxe5 ♕d4 would be extremely close to a draw) 28...♕xd1 29.♖xd1 ♖xd1+ 30.♔h2 ♖xe5 31.♕b3+



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

fails to the simple 31...♖ed5 (but not 31...♖dd5?? 32.f4 ♖f5 33.g4) 32.♕xb7 a5 33.b4 axb4 34.a5 ♖d8, and Black is absolutely in time to parry the threats.

**27.♖ad1! ♕xd1 28.♖xd1 ♖xd1+ 29.♔h2** Now White is really threatening ♕b3+. **29...♖d7 30.♕b3+ ♔h7 31.exf6 gxf6 32.♘d4**

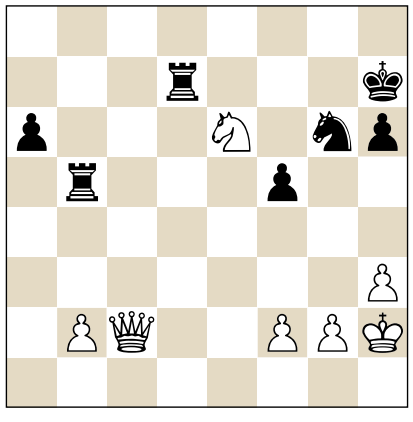


I had stopped my calculations there, and this powerful move allows the knight to join the party. White's advantage is already overwhelming, but in rapid chess, Black's defensive task gets even tougher.

**32...♖e5 33.♘e6** Intending f4. 33.g4!?, would have been interesting, to insist on bringing the knight to f5.

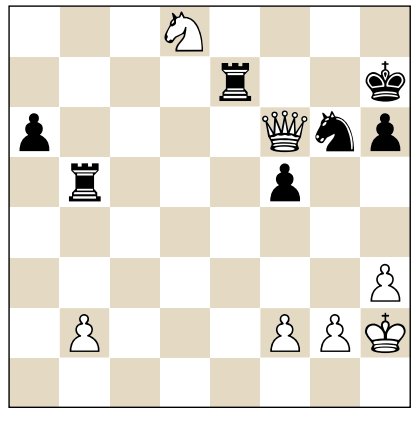
**33...b5?!** 33...♖e7 34.♘d8 ♖f5 35.♕b6, and I keep a dominant position. **34.axb5?!** 34.f4! bxa4 35.♕xa4 would immediately have been curtains, but I had missed that the ♖d7 is under attack: 35...♖ed5 36.f5.

**34...♖xb5 35.♕c2 f5**



**36.♕c6?!** 36.g4! would have won the pawn due to the pin on the diagonal: 36...♖f7 (36...fxg4 37.♘f8+) 37.♘d4 ♖b6 38.♘xf5, and Black can safely resign.

**36...♖f7 37.♘d8! ♖e7 38.♕f6** Still my plan isn't too bad, since the queen will work well with the knight now. Also, Black can't properly coordinate his pieces.



**38...a5** 38...f4 39.♘e6 ♖e5 40.♘xf4 ♘xf4 41.♕xf4 would be a rather easy technical win, since White mostly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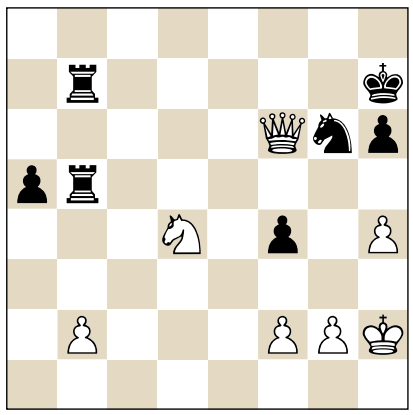
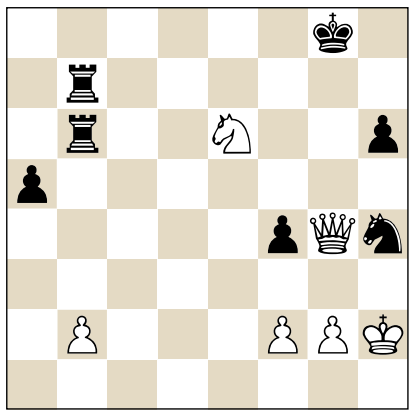
needs to advance his passed pawns on the kingside and escape the checks.
**39.h4 f4 40.♘e6 ♖eb7 41.♘d4!**



I took my time and finally forced the issue with this move and its follow-up.
**41...♖5b6** 41...♖h5 42.♘f5, and Black is helpless against ♔h3 and ♔g4. He still can defend with 42...♘e5 43.♕xe5 ♖f7 44.♕xf4 ♖hxf5 45.♕e4, and White should still find it quite easy to win this endgame.
**42.♕f5 ♔g8 43.♘e6 ♘xh4 44.♕g4+**



**44...♔h7** 44...♔h8 45.♘xf4 would trap the knight. (45.♘c5 would also do the trick after 45...♖c7 46.♕xh4 ♖xc5 47.♕d8+.)
**45.♘f8+ ♔h8 46.♕xh4 ♔g7 47.♘d7** And the knight escapes with this last trick. Black resigned.

Magnus Carlsen won the rapid part with 14 out of 9, since double points could be gained in the rapid games, ahead of Grischuk (13) and Nakamura (12), while Vachier-Lagrave was only shared 4th with 11 points. The Norwegian was generally impressive and remained undefeated.

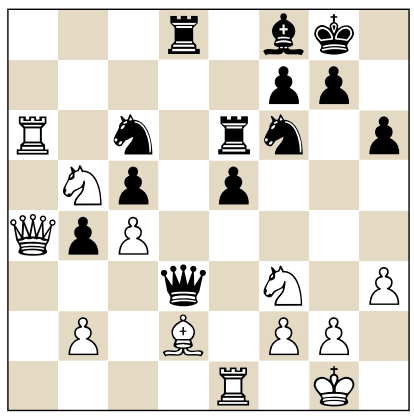
LENNART OOTES

**The rapid game between Wesley So and Magnus Carlsen saw a thrilling finish. The Norwegian was generally impressive in the rapid and remained undefeated.**

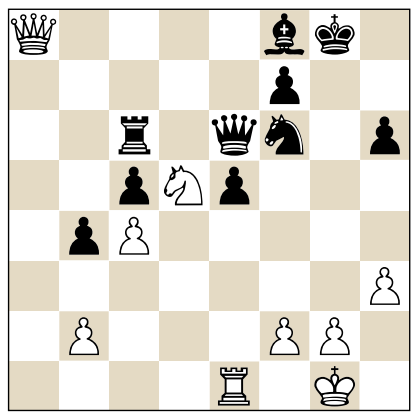
Here is the thrilling finish of his rapid game against Wesley So.

**Wesley So**
**Magnus Carlsen**
Paris rapid 2017 (4)
Giuoco Piano

**1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗c4 ♗c5 4.0-0 ♘f6 5.d3 0-0 6.c3 d6 7.♖e1 a6 8.♗b3 ♖e8 9.h3 h6 10.♘bd2 ♗e6 11.♘f1 ♗xb3 12.♕xb3 d5 13.♗e3 ♗f8 14.♖ad1 ♘a5 15.♕c2 c5 16.exd5 ♕xd5 17.♗d2 ♘c6 18.♘e3 ♕d7 19.♘c4 ♕c7 20.a4 b5 21.axb5 axb5 22.♘a3 ♕b7 23.c4 b4 24.♘b5 ♖ad8 25.♖a1 ♕d7 26.♖a6 ♖e6 27.♕a4 ♕xd3**



So has been outplayed and has lost a pawn. Fully aware of the seriousness of his troubles, he tries to muddy the waters with a clever sacrifice.
**28.♗xh6** 28.♘c7 ♘d4 is actually a worse version, since the ♗d2 will be hanging anyway.
**28...gxh6 29.♘c7 ♘d4?** With little time to work things out, it is not easy to see that 29...♖ed6 30.♖xc6 e4 leads to a winning advantage.
**30.♘xd4 ♖xa6 31.♕xa6 ♖d6 32.♘c6 ♕f5 33.♘d5 ♕e6 34.♕a8 ♖xc6**
Carlsen has played the best moves and kept a large advantage. Here, everybody expected 35.♘e7+ ♕xe7 36.♕xc6, although 36...e4 allows Black to stabilize. But So uncorked...



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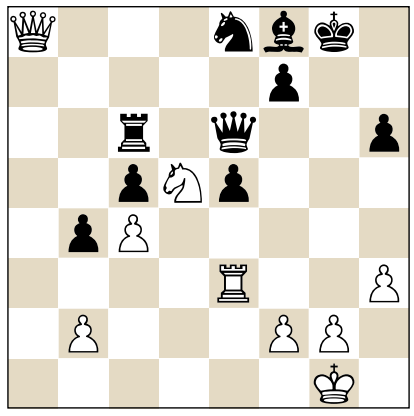
**35.♖e3!?** Another tricky move in time-trouble, which Carlsen fails to answer correctly.
**35...♘e8?** 35...♘h5 would force 36.♘e7+ ♕xe7 37.♕xc6, when Black remains on top after 37...♘f4.

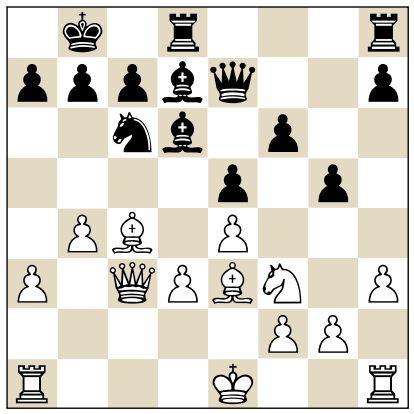


**36.♖g3+?** Wesley's attempts would have been rewarded, if he had found the extra-terrestrial 36.♘f6+!. Believe it or not, Black has to be very careful here! His best defence against ♖g3+ is 36...♕xf6 37.♕xe8 ♕g6! 38.♖g3 ♕xg3 39.fxg3 ♖e6, with a probable draw.
**36...♔h7** Now it's all over. **37.♖f3 e4 38.♖f4 ♖a6 39.♖xf7+ ♕xf7 40.♕xa6 ♗g7 41.♕c6 ♗d4 42.♔h2 ♘g7 43.♘e3 ♕f4+** 0-1.

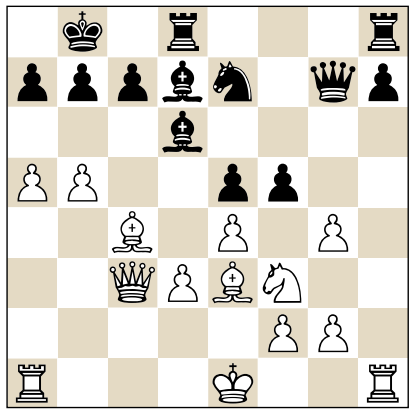
The first day of the blitz started with a perfect 4/4 for the World Champion, but a loss on time against Grischuk threw a spanner in the works. His 6½/9 at the end of the day was not as good as Nakamura's seven points. Here's a crushing win by the American.

**Hikaru Nakamura**
**Shakhriyar Mamedyarov**
Paris blitz 2017 (7)
English Opening

**1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.♕a4+ ♗d7 6.♕h4** This line of the Anti-Grünfeld was once quite popular – not a bad choice for a blitz game.
**6...♘xc3 7.♕d4 f6 8.♕xc3 e5 9.e4 ♘c6 10.a3 ♗d6 11.♗c4 ♕e7 12.h3 0-0-0 13.d3 ♔b8 14.♗e3 g5 15.b4**



**15...♕g7**
15...♘xb4 does not really work because of 16.♗xa7+ ♔xa7 17.axb4+ ♔b8 18.0-0. White's attack is faster. However, 15...b6! looks like a good way to slow down White's aggressive intentions.
**16.b5 ♘e7 17.a4 f5 18.a5 g4?**
Starting with 18...f4 was the right way to play, when a full fight is on.
**19.hxg4**



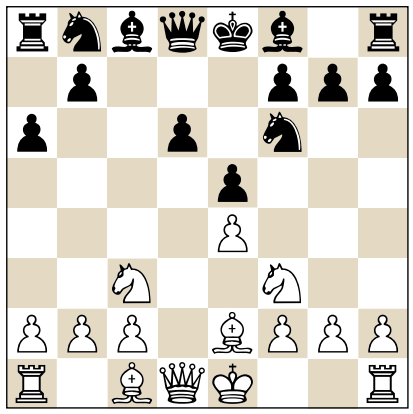
**19...f4?** Loses a pawn and all attacking hopes. 19...fxe4 20.dxe4 ♕xg4 21.♖h2 is better for White, but it's not over yet. **20.♗xf4 ♕xg4 21.♗g3 ♘g6 22.b6 ♘f4 23.♔f1 cxb6 24.axb6 axb6 25.♖h4 ♕g6 26.♘xe5** 1-0.

Many people did not really mind Carlsen's slowing down, since this gave them at least some hope for some suspense on the last day, when blitz rounds 10-18 would be played. The possibility of an exciting finish arose immediately in the first game with the Norwegian losing to Caruana, who recovered from his abysmal performance in the rapid with a very good result in the blitz. But contrary to expectations, the only

one to challenge Carlsen's lead turned out to be the home crowd's favourite, MVL. Notching up point after point, he managed to get within striking distance of the World Champion. If he won their 7th-round encounter, he would catch up with him.

**Magnus Carlsen**
**Maxime Vachier-Lagrave**
Paris blitz 2017 (16)
Sicilian Defence, Najdorf Variation

**1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗e2 e5 7.♘f3**



**7...h6** In their rapid game MVL had chosen 7...♗e7 8.♗g5 ♘bd7 9.a4 b6 10.♘d2 h6 11.♗xf6 ♘xf6 12.♘c4 ♗b7 13.a5 b5 14.♘b6 ♘xe4 15.♘xe4 ♗xe4 16.♗f3 ♗xf3 17.♕xf3 ♖a7 18.c4, with a wild position.

**8.♘d2** ♗g5 has been prevented, but as in the previous game, Carlsen reroutes his knight to e3 anyway.

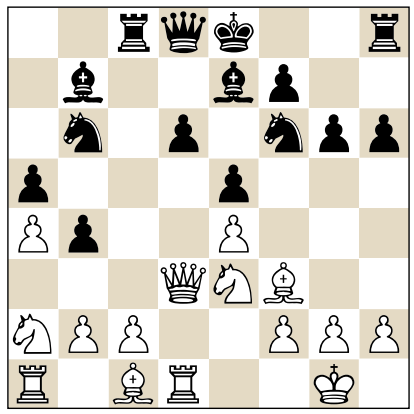
**8...b5 9.♘f1 ♗b7 10.♗f3 ♘bd7 11.♘e3 ♘b6 12.0-0 ♖c8 13.♕d3 g6 14.♖d1 ♗e7 15.a4**

It is not impossible that Carlsen still found himself in his preparation. In any case, the computer shows a white advantage. But chess is no exact science, and blitz even less so, of course. Activity is paramount, and MVL knows something about this!

LENNART OOTES

**Maxime Vachier-Lagrave had to win his last blitz game against Alexander Grischuk to clinch the Paris GCT. Magnus Carlsen is happy to see a draw as it means a tiebreak match against the Frenchman.**

**15...b4 16.♘a2 a5**



**17.c3?** According to the computer, White could have claimed a serious advantage with 17.♕b5+ ♗c6 18.♕xa5 ♖a8 19.♕xb4 ♖xa4 20.♕b3. This is not so obvious to the human eye, but would have been better than Carlsen's blunder, of course.

**17...b3 18.♘b4** 18.♕b5+ ♗c6 19.♕xb3 ♗xa4 was perhaps the detail Carlsen had overlooked.

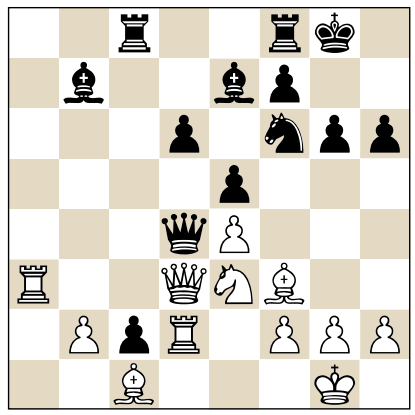
**18...axb4 19.a5 bxc3!?**

MVL prefers to clear the situation. 19...♘bd7 20.cxb4 0-0 is better for Black, but he has to defend a bit instead of playing actively.

**20.axb6 c2 21.♖d2 ♕xb6 22.♖a3 0-0 23.♖xb3 ♕a7**

It is harsh to condemn this in a blitz game. MVL was in 'play-for-a-win' mode and preferred to keep the queens on. But it appears that 23...♕a6 was the way to keep an edge.

**24.♖a3 ♕d4**

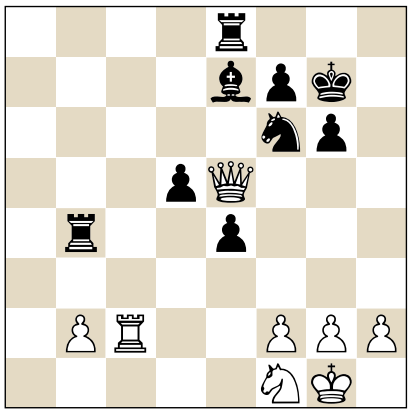


Implicitly sacrificing the queen, since Black has no alternative after:

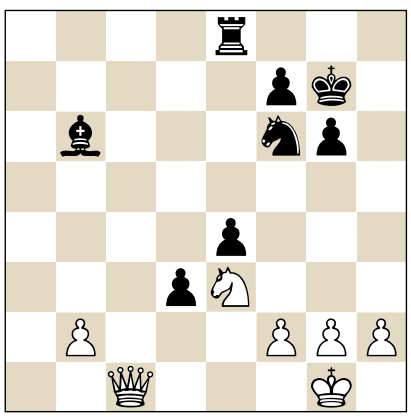
**25.♕b3** But MVL had assessed correctly that things were delectably messy. **25...♕xd2 26.♗xd2 c1♕+**

**'Notching up point after point, MVL managed to get within striking distance of the World Champion.'**

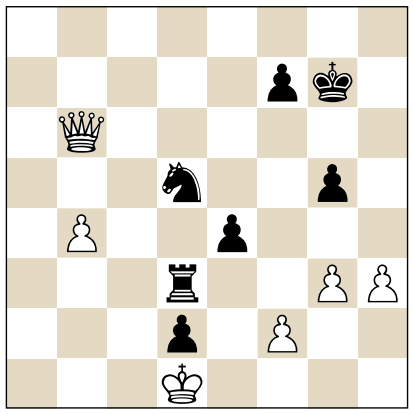
**27.♗xc1 ♖xc1+ 28.♘f1 ♗xe4 29.♕e3 ♖c4 30.♕xh6 d5!?**
MVL playing the acrobat!
**31.♗xe4 ♘g4!**
31...♗xa3 32.♗xg6 is losing, and 31...♖xe4 32.♖h3 ♘h5 33.g3 looks suspicious.
**32.♕h3 ♖xe4 33.♖c3 ♖b4**
This position should objectively be better for White, but it is so much easier to play as Black. In blitz, this is essential. Incidentally, MVL was about a minute ahead on the clock, whereas Carlsen was getting dangerously close to his last seconds.
**34.♖c2 ♔g7 35.♕d3 ♘f6 36.♕g3 e4 37.♕e5**
37.♘e3 ♖a8 38.h3 was stronger.
**37...♖e8**



**38.♘e3?** 38.♖c6 ♗d8 39.♕c3 would allow White to repel the ♖b4 and thus prevent the d-pawn from advancing. Yet, it would still have remained practically complicated for Carlsen.
**38...d4 39.♘g4 d3 40.♖c1 ♗d8 41.♕c3 ♖b7 42.♘e3 ♖c7 43.♕d2 ♖xc1+ 44.♕xc1 ♗b6**



**45.♔f1?!**
With just seconds on the clock, it is clear that Carlsen had overlooked that 45.♘f5+! leads to a draw.
**45...♗xe3! 46.♕xe3 ♖b8 47.♕d4 ♖b5 48.♔e1 ♖g5 49.g3 ♖d5 50.♕c3 d2+ 51.♔d1 ♖d3 52.♕e5 ♖d5 53.♕f4 g5**
By now, it is hard to understand who is playing for what... I guess they were simply trying to play sensible moves.
**54.♕e3 ♔g6?**
54...g4 was correct, as now White could have gotten an advantage with 55.h4!, taking control of square g5, and paralysing Black's army.
**55.h3? ♖d3 56.♕b6 ♔g7 57.b4?? ♘d5** 0-1.



These two moves were played in a flash, and Magnus literally jumped from his chair. He had again cracked under time-pressure, but MVL's daring play was certainly to blame, too.

The Frenchman drew his last two games, whereas Carlsen lost a nerve-wrecking game against Nakamura, before hitting back with a last-round win against So. According to the GCT rules, Carlsen and MVL had to play a tiebreak to determine who would take the additional two points in the GCT standings (prize-money being shared). The time-control for the first two games was 10 minutes per player with a 5-second delay. As Carlsen admitted in his final interview for Canal+ Sport, reaching a playoff was an incredible relief after the drama in the blitz. And once again he showed that his opponents should never give him a second chance.

NOTES BY
**Peter Heine Nielsen**

**Magnus Carlsen**
**Maxime Vachier-Lagrave**
Paris rapid 2017 (tb-1)
King's Indian

Day 5 of the Paris Grand Chess Tour was supposed to be a duel between the leaders Magnus Carlsen and Hikaru Nakamura, but while nine rounds seems too little to bridge a three-point lead, for MVL it was actually one round too many, since it allowed Magnus to catch up with the Frenchman and force a tiebreak with a last-round win against So.
**1.d4 ♘f6 2.♗f4!?**
The time when we started rolling our eyes when seeing this move is long gone, and nowadays it is not even played to avoid the theory, but has become a topical discussion on its own.
**2...g6 3.e3 ♗g7 4.♘f3 d6 5.♗e2**

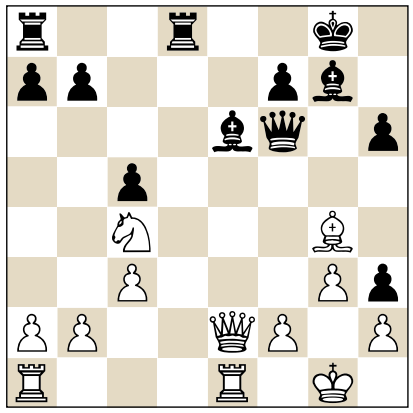


**5...♘h5!?**
In Stavanger, Vachier-Lagrave had played 4...0-0, but here his 4th move gave Black this extra option which, if Magnus had been afraid of it, 5.h3 would have prevented.
**6.♗g5 h6 7.♗h4 g5 8.♘fd2 ♘f4**
A very human move, intending to weaken the white pawn structure. But it is noteworthy that the computer prefers 8...gxh4.
**9.exf4 gxh4 10.c3 c5 11.dxc5 dxc5 12.♘a3 0-0 13.0-0**
13.♕c2, intending 14.0-0-0, was also relevant, but Magnus is aiming to

exploit Black's weakened structure in a more positional manner.

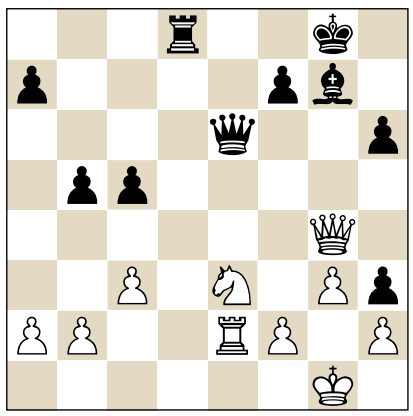
**13...♘c6 14.♖e1 h3 15.g3 e5 16.fxe5 ♘xe5 17.♘f3 ♘xf3+ 18.♗xf3 ♕f6 19.♘c4 ♖d8 20.♕e2 ♗e6 21.♗g4?!**

This looks like a text-book manoeuvre, but surprisingly enough, it allows sufficient counterplay. 21.♘e3 controlling the white squares, gives a pleasant edge after 21...♖d7 22.a4 ♖ad8 23.♖ad1, when White keeps considerable pressure.



**21...♗xg4** A good move. But even better was the immediate 21...b5, since 22.♗xe6 ♕xe6! 23.♕xe6?! fxe6 would leave Black way too active, with ...b4 and ...♖d2 to follow. White would play 22♘e3, but then black has an improved version of the game.

**22.♕xg4 b5 23.♘e3 ♖d2 24.♖e2 ♖ad8 25.♖ae1 ♖xe2 26.♖xe2 ♕e6!**



Just in time, saving the pawn on h3 and forcing a tenable ending.

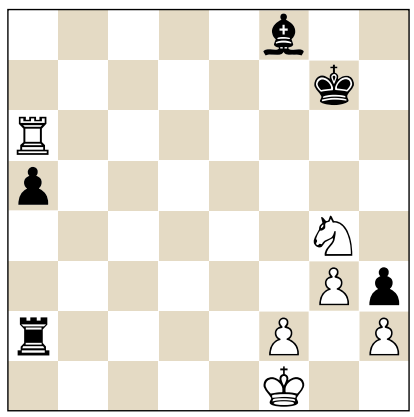
**27.♕xe6 fxe6 28.♔f1 b4 29.cxb4 cxb4 30.♖c2 b3! 31.axb3 ♖b8 32.♖c6 ♖xb3 33.♖xe6 ♖xb2**

LENNART OOTES

**Magnus Carlsen decided the tiebreak against Maxime Vachier-Lagrave in his favour by winning a sharp ending in the first game.**

**34.♘f5 ♗f8 35.♘xh6+ ♔g7 36.♘g4 a5 37.♖a6 ♖a2**

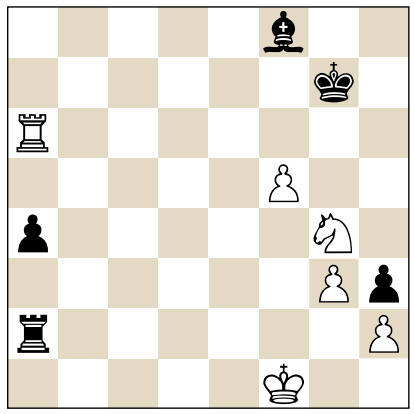
The day certainly hadn't gone well for Carlsen. First he lost a three-point lead, and now the opening advantage in this game is gone. In other words: time to save the day!



**38.f4!**

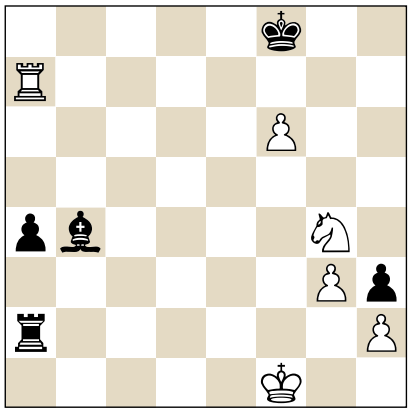
Obviously risky. Black's plan of pushing the pawn to a3, then going ...♖b2 and ...a2, threatening ...♖b1+, followed by ...a1♕, is close to unstoppable, but Magnus had decided he would be able to play his own trumps just in time.

**38...a4 39.f5**



**39...♗b4!** Black has to vacate the f8-square for his king, since 39...a3? 40.♖a7+! ♔h8 41.♘f6 would win, albeit with a very complex line: 41...♗g7 42.♖a8+ ♗f8 43.♖xf8+ ♔g7 44.♘d7 ♖a1+ 45.♔e2 a2 46.f6+!, winning, because after 46...♔g6 47.♘e5+! it becomes trivial, since 48.♖a8 will happen next, invalidating Black's motif of 48...♖h1 49.♖xa2 ♖xh2+, because the f-pawn will queen or, if Black goes ...♔xf6, the knight will join the defence with ♘g4+.

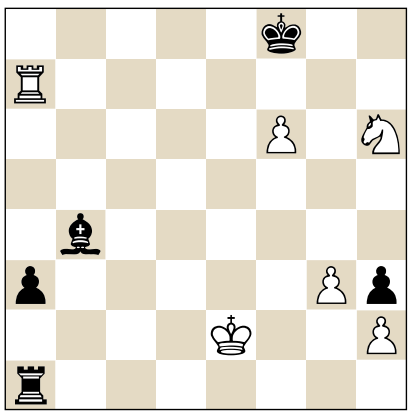
**40.♖a7+ ♔f8 41.f6**



**41...♖a1+?!**

Not a mistake in the sense that it changes the objective assessment of the position, but after 41...a3! it is White who has to be careful and avoid, for example, 42.♘e5??, which would lose to 42...♖a1+!, when White loses a piece. 42.♖a6 still holds, but it's not obvious and it's White who will then play for the win.

**42.♔e2 a3 43.♘h6**

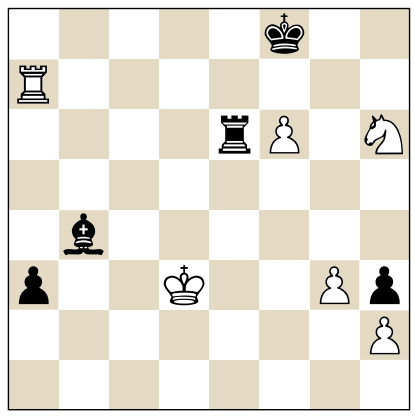


**43...♖e1+?!**

Dealing with the threat of ♖a8 mate, but 43...♔e8 would have been an easier road to the draw, since White's best would have been 44.f7+, but as the game shows, White prefers his pawn on f6 to create threats.

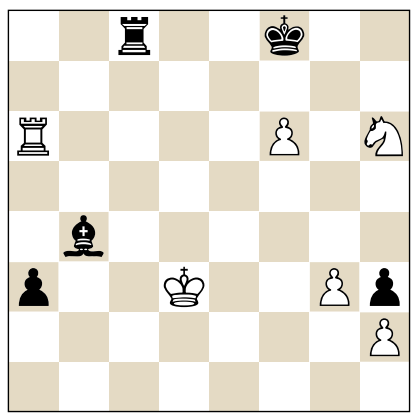
**44.♔d3 ♖e6?** An important square for the black rook, but paradoxically occupying it immediately, means losing control of it!

44...♗d6! would have prevented what will happen next:

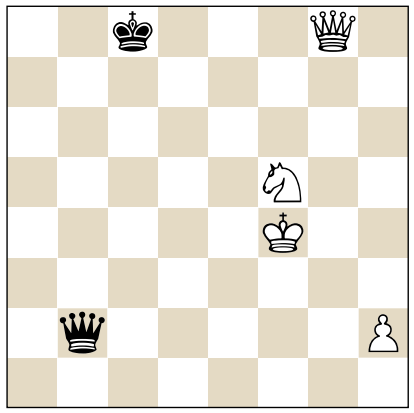


**45.♖a8+ ♖e8 46.♖a6! ♖c8?**

The absolutely last chance was 46...♖e5, intending 47... ♖a5, even though White keeps serious winning chances after 47.♖a4!. Now, however, it becomes trivial:



**47.g4! ♖d8+ 48.♔e4 ♔e8 49.g5 ♗f8 50.♔f5 ♖d2 51.♖a8+ ♖d8 52.♖xd8+ ♔xd8 53.g6! a2 54.g7 ♗xg7 55.fxg7 a1♕ 56.g8♕+ ♔c7 57.♕g3+ ♔d7 58.♕xh3 ♕g7 59.♔f4+ ♔c7 60.♘f5 ♕b2 61.♕h7+ ♔c8 62.♕g8+**



And with 63.♕g7+, swapping the queens, on the cards, Maxime resigned.

Not in any way a fantastic game, especially for Carlsen's standards, but some days things just do not work out, and getting the job done anyway in such cases is very much part of a successful sporting career.

A draw still had to be made in the second tie-break game to clinch the Paris title. With a solid defensive move the World Champion forced his opponent to take risks, and eventually agreed to repetition of moves in a superior position, putting an end to a rollercoaster of a day. ■

**Paris rapid 2017 — cat. XXII**

| | | | TPR |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Carlsen | 7 | 2997 |
| 2 | Grischuk | 6½ | 2951 |
| 3 | Nakamura | 6 | 2908 |
| 4 | Vachier-Lagrave | 5½ | 2861 |
| 5 | Mamedyarov | 5½ | 2861 |
| 6 | So | 4½ | 2780 |
| 7 | Karjakin | 4 | 2740 |
| 8 | Topalov | 2½ | 2621 |
| 9 | Bacrot | 2 | 2571 |
| 10 | Caruana | 1½ | 2507 |

**Paris blitz 2017 — cat. XXII**

| | | | TPR |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Vachier-Lagrave | 13 | 2947 |
| 2 | Nakamura | 11 | 2863 |
| 3 | Caruana | 11 | 2860 |
| 4 | Karjakin | 10 | 2826 |
| 5 | Carlsen | 10 | 2820 |
| 6 | Grischuk | 9 | 2785 |
| 7 | Mamedyarov | 9 | 2781 |
| 8 | Topalov | 6½ | 2685 |
| 9 | So | 6 | 2655 |
| 10 | Bacrot | 4½ | 2598 |

**Paris combined 2017**

| | | rapid | blitz | total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Carlsen | 14 | 10 | 24 |
| 2 | Vachier-Lagrave | 11 | 13 | 24 |
| 3 | Nakamura | 12 | 11 | 23 |
| 4 | Grischuk | 13 | 9 | 22 |
| 5 | Mamedyarov | 11 | 9 | 20 |
| 6 | Karjakin | 8 | 10 | 18 |
| 7 | So | 9 | 6 | 15 |
| 8 | Caruana | 3 | 11 | 14 |
| 9 | Topalov | 5 | 6½ | 11½ |
| 10 | Bacrot | 4 | 4½ | 8½ |

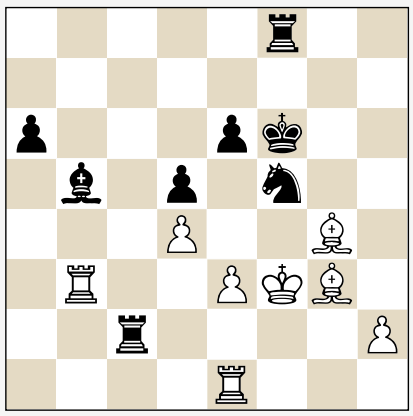
tiebreak: Carlsen-Vachier-Lagrave 1½-½

# MAXIMize your Tactics

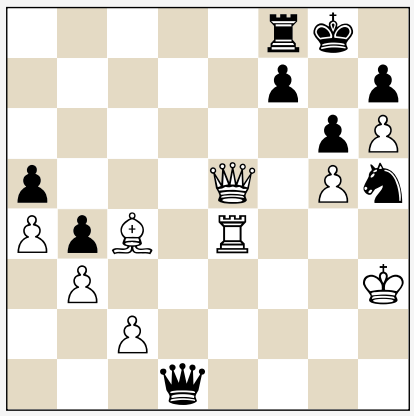
with Maxim Notkin

## Find the best move in the positions below

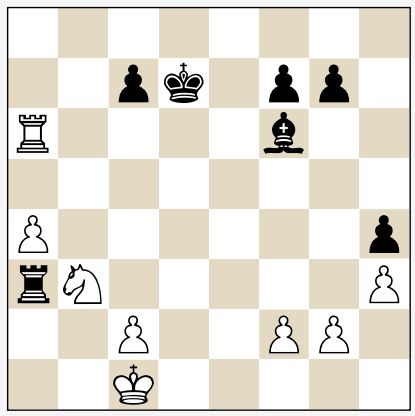
Solutions on page105



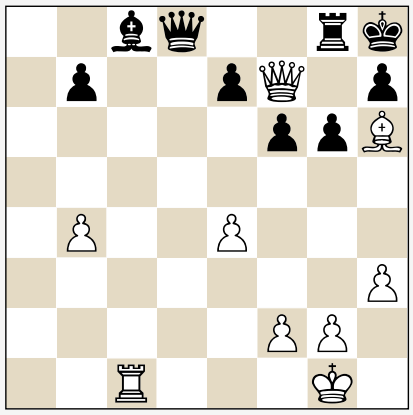
1. Black to move



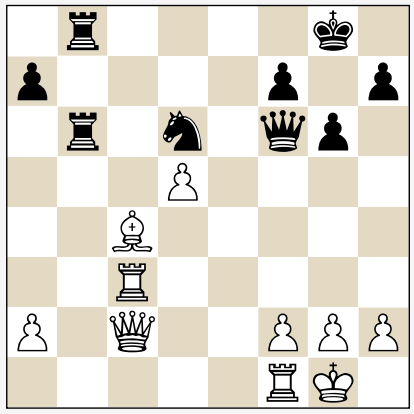
2. White to move



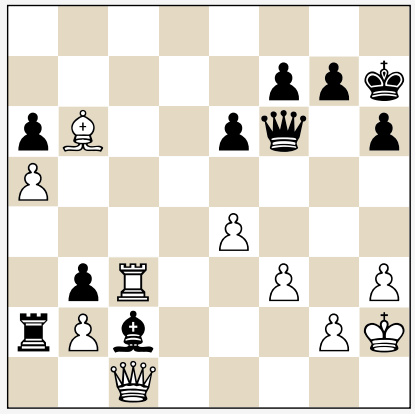
3. White to move



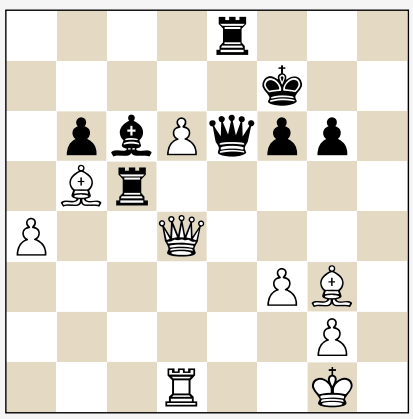
4. White to move



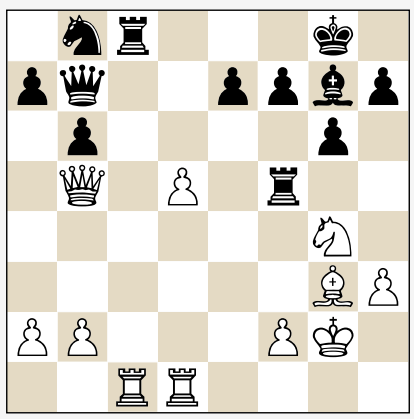
5. Black to move



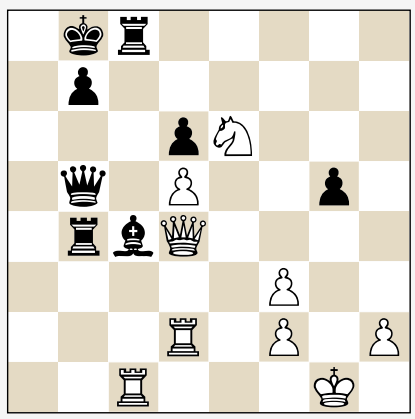
6. Black to move



7. White to move



8. White to move



9. White to move

# Cayman – a great opportunity

As the British Airways Boeing 777 entered a holding pattern, the pilot announced that the slight delay was due to an iguana on the runway. This, after all, was Owen Roberts Airport, Grand Cayman, and not London Heathrow. I soon discovered that while the rare, blue iguanas were endangered, the green variety were to be found just about everywhere – as live specimens in gardens, and as splattered carcasses along the winding country roads.

My invitation to this Caribbean tax haven came from Shaun Tracey, a commercial lawyer in his late 30s, and former captain of the thriving Hackney CC. Finding, upon settling in this balmy idyll a few years ago, a UK dependency of roughly 60,000 people with no organised chess, Shaun quickly set about remedying this lamentable cultural deficiency. He was fortunate to stumble across fellow enthusiast Carlo Lee – a photographer from Jamaica. Together they formed the Cayman Chess Club, which meets twice weekly in the public library and outside the West Indies Wine Company at Camana Bay for pleasantly boozy al fresco pawn-pushing. The convivial social environment means that the profile of attendees differs from your average chess club: in 2016, notably, every participant from the Miss Cayman Islands beauty pageant showed up to learn the royal game.

Not content to rest upon these laurels, this dynamic duo began a pilot program, teaching chess at two primary schools, which met with warm approbation from kids, parents and head teachers alike. Shaun explained his philosophy rather like a missionary: he wants to establish a thriving chess community in Cayman as his legacy for when he eventually returns to the UK. In his view, the best way of ensuring a bright future is to employ a coach for all ten public schools. When I spoke to Shaun about this project back in the Spring, he had not only carefully calculated the costing, but obtained the conditional approval of the Education Minister, and held meetings with a potential major sponsor. As is normally the case, the undertaking had at the time been greeted with greater verbal encouragement than hard cash. To give the venture a high-profile kick-start, I suggested, not entirely altruistically, that Shaun invite a handsome English chess legend for a corporate fund-raiser, plus a further simul against kids. He concurred with this most admirable plan.

In the meantime, I placed Shaun's job advert in the social media, and Sagar Shah, at ChessBase India, was also kind enough to run a story. The headline tax-free salary of c. $37,500 annually proved sufficient to entice about sixty applications, many of excellent quality, from all around the globe – including a couple of GMs. The remuneration was perhaps deceptively attractive, as the cost of living in Cayman is rather high – a factor not initially appreciated by everyone. That caveat aside, the job was nevertheless an attractive one for many.

By the time I arrived, at the end of May, a great deal of enthusiasm had been generated, and the take-up for the Grandmaster Corporate Challenge was complete. The luxurious venue for the event was the recently opened Kimpton Seafire Hotel. A TV crew recorded the historic occasion. Her Excellency the Governor, Helen Kilpatrick CB, delivered a fine opening speech and, I was pleased to note, stayed rather longer than strict courtesy required. Indeed, the simultaneous display was supported throughout by a substantial number of spirited spectators, although whether this was, in small part, a consequence of the free bar, I would not dare to suggest.

The evening was a great success. With three headline sponsors – Ogier (a law firm), BDO (accountants) and Dart (property development) – plus a further 15 support sponsors, the evening raised about $30,000. Additional endowments have been pledged subsequently. Indeed, the Cayman Islands is by no means short of money – an astonishing 85% of the world's hedge funds are domiciled there. The art is therefore not in identifying potential resources, of which there are many, but in skillfully persuading companies that you have a project worthy of assisting.

My simul against schoolchildren at the George Town Public Library went well. Again, there was a lot of media interest. Twenty-five places were taken and a further dozen or so kids showed up eager for a game, even though they didn't know how to play. They were gently encouraged by Carlo but, correctly, not allowed

to take seats. My complete and rapid demolition of opponents (I had conceded two draws in the corporate event) convinced me that Shaun had been right in that it was neither necessary nor desirable to recruit the highest-rated job applicant. Instead, when dealing with novices, it is far more important that the coach possesses skills such as diligence, enthusiasm and reliability. The chosen candidate, Anzel Laubscher, a WIM from South Africa and, coincidentally, also a human-rights lawyer, should prove to be an excellent choice for the position. Anzel will deliver the schools program, which starts this September, and she also aims to organise an international tournament.

Far from being despondent about the current mediocre chess standard in Cayman, I view it as a great opportunity. In a year or so, there will be a sharply expanded base of young players, some of whom will inevitably show promise – at least on a regional level.

As a British Overseas Territory with independent IOC recognition – unlike Gibraltar and the Isle of Man, where arguably the two strongest open tournaments of the year will take place – the Cayman Islands is entitled to its own federation. This fact has not escaped the attention of interested political parties. The late Sevan Muradian from Chicago was the first to dangle the 'carrot' of FIDE membership before the nascent Cayman chess community, back in 2013, promising they would be fast-tracked to the world body, but only on condition that he and other non-resident Kirsan-underlings were appointed to the Cayman governing board. We should recall that this was the same mischief-maker who lost a court case to the 13th World Champion for registering numerous 'kasparov2014' domain names 'in bad faith'. This preposterous, unethical suggestion was rejected forthwith, but in January 2017, more reasonable discussions were initiated by Allan Herbert from Barbados, supported by Jorge Vega, President of the Americas – the man who wields the huge Latin vote. Shaun took the rather quaint view that the chess in schools project was his immediate priority, and that FIDE membership could wait – thus displaying charming ignorance of how things are traditionally done. No actual activity, accountability or anything is necessary, as long as a national federation is prepared to cast the vote the 'right' way. If you are well-connected, the proverbial one man and his dog amply suffices. Just ask FIDE errand-boy Jamie Kenmure, who implausibly represents Australia, Solomon Islands, Palau, Nauru and Guam.

On the last day a rather leisurely sponsors' lunch was held, which lasted a staggering nine and a half hours. One of the sponsors was Glen Trenough from BDO, whom I had played in the simul, and who had brought the Squash World Championships to the Cayman Islands in 2012. Joining us was my old friend Ian Wilkinson QC, President of the Jamaican Federation, who entertained and even shocked us with tales of eye-watering skulduggery in Tromsø 2014. Over several hours and bottles of wine we played a blindfold game of surprisingly high quality, considering our intoxication, which I only won after he missed a crushing sacrifice. At some point we were joined by Glenda McTaggart, from Dart. Although not a player herself, she was a zealous convert to the benefits of chess in education, having watched an inspiring '60 Minutes' program on the subject. She offered a great deal of excellent practical advice on how to attract more funding, insisting that the federation be established as non-profit as soon as possible. Shaun agreed, although he was concerned that government approval of non-profits usually takes many months. This potential obstacle was swiftly overcome when Glenda's husband Roy showed up a bit later, having been sworn in as Finance Minister earlier that day (it's a small place). Roy jovially brushed aside administrative delay with the comment 'Just send it to me. I will make sure we deal with it.' Indeed, the formal non-profit application has now been submitted and will be examined by the Cayman Cabinet in late July. No difficulties are anticipated.

**'The Cayman Islands is by no means short of money – an astonishing 85% of the world's hedge funds are domiciled there.'**

Whither now for Cayman chess? Clearly a lot hinges on Anzel's year as coach. If it is successful, there are high hopes that the position will become permanent. There will be a new pool of hundreds of young players who will want to participate at home and throughout the Caribbean, if not further afield. One or two of the senior players have already marked down the dates of the Batumi Olympiad in 2018 with a glint in their eye. And Roy McTaggart is already entertaining thoughts that Cayman may have an open tournament to rival Gibraltar. Time will tell, but if it happens, remember that you read it here first. ■

LEUVEN

Hot on the heels of his Paris triumph, Magnus Carlsen also claimed the second leg of the Grand Chess Tour in the fabulous 15th century city hall of Leuven. In the rapid part Wesley So reaffirmed his class by finishing well ahead of the rest, but in the blitz the American too had to watch in awe as the World Champion destroyed the field in an explosion that Garry Kasparov called one of the best blitz achievements ever.

**DIRK JAN TEN GEUZENDAM**

## Your Next Move Grand Chess Tour Leuven

# Magnus

Just like last year the Grand Chess Tour season started with back-to-back events in Paris and Leuven. An understandable decision from a logistic and organizational point of view, but at the same time a bit of a pity. Three days after the last blitz games were played in Paris, the first rapid games in Leuven started. A total of 243 rapid and blitz games in the space of five days is a lot, but with a total of 486 encounters in thirteen days, even the biggest chess fan risks overeating.

Fortunately the fields were not entirely identical. Only three GCT players appeared in both events: Magnus Carlsen, Maxime Vachier-Lagrave and Wesley So (interestingly, finishing overall first, second and third in Leuven – speaking about warming up!) and there were four new wildcards in the Belgian leg: Ian Nepomniachtchi, Baadur Jobava, Vassily Ivanchuk and Anish Giri.

The hero of the first three days was Wesley So, who admirably recovered from his poor showing in Paris. The American Champion dominated the rapid and deservedly finished first. The names of his victims say enough: Carlsen, Kramnik, Aronian, Anand and the luckless Jobava, who was totally out of form.

A key game was obviously So's win against Carlsen. Here it is, with the winner's notes and his appreciation of the beauty of Leuven and the warm welcome the players were accorded.

NOTES BY
**Wesley So**

**Magnus Carlsen**
**Wesley So**
Leuven rapid 2017 (3)
Nimzo-Indian, Rubinstein Variation

Leuven is a beautiful place and it seemed like all of Europe was on holiday there. The Grote Markt

LENNART OOTES

**The ten participants together with Jan Callewaert on Leuven's Great Market Square, in front of his new hotel The Fourth in a building that dates back to 1479.**

# Reloaded

plaza in front of our hotel was lit up day and night, and with restaurants clanging dishes, music playing on every corner, people laughing, talking, biking and walking around, there was never a dull moment (even when you wanted one!).

Here to work, I could not take part in the party atmosphere, but sometimes I would take a break to stand at my window and stare down at all the excitement. We stayed in our sponsor's (Jan Callewaert of Your Next Move) new hotel, The Fourth, in a building that dates back to 1479. This is its fourth transformation in the last 500 years and we were the first guests. Despite a few hiccups because it had just opened, it was like staying in a palace. My room had stained glass windows. The ceilings were very high. The floors were wide planks of satin-smooth wood. The hotel also has its own restaurant called Tafelrond and, believe me, it's a mistake to eat anywhere else, because their food is amazing. It was so nice to have a great place to hibernate between my disappointing performance in Paris and the Leuven tournament coming at me like an unstoppable train.

Everyone asks me why I didn't play well in Paris. I don't know. I have no idea why things like that happen. If anyone out there has solved the problem of sudden brain freeze at inconvenient moments, send me a note. The best I could hope was that my brain would rejoin its owner in Leuven. And voilà! Just as suddenly as it had frozen, without any effort on my part, it slowly unfroze!

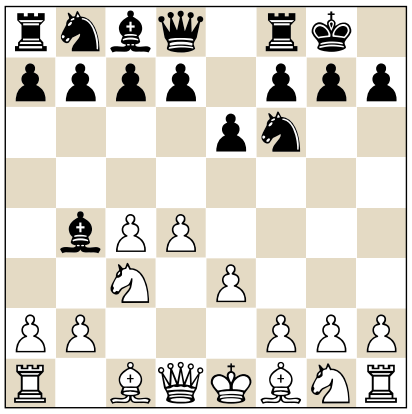
I'll show you my rapid game with GM Carlsen. Before this game I had 1½/2 and was feeling pleased at being able to see the board again. The horrible memory of the Paris leg was fading, my level of play was climbing and I felt there might be good things to come. That I had missed good winning chances against MVL in the previous round was disappointing but not unreasonable. In fast games

there are always going to be missed opportunities and unlikely saves for every player.

**1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4**

I thought Magnus would go for his London killer, 2.♗f4, again, but apparently he saves this one only for the blitz games.

**2...e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e3 0-0**

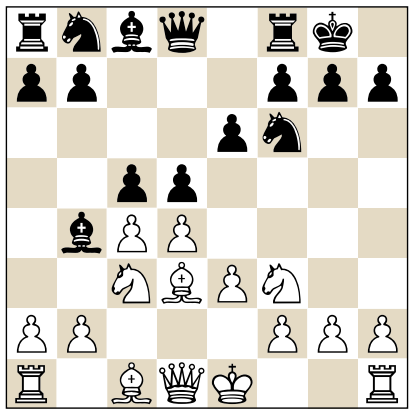


**5.♘f3**

Later on I realized that Magnus had played this two rounds earlier and won a nice game against Levon Aronian: 5.♗d3 d5 6.a3 ♗xc3+ 7.bxc3 dxc4 8.♗xc4 c5 9.♘e2 ♕c7 10.♗a2 (White looks quite passive, but his bishop pair contains lots of potential) 10...b6 11.0-0 ♗a6 12.♗b2 ♘c6 13.♖c1 ♖fd8 14.c4 cxd4 15.exd4, and White's position looks quite threatening. Perhaps he should have gone for this line again.

I notice that for the fast time-controls, Magnus prepares these little sub-lines (such as 1.d4 and 2.♗f4) quite deeply, with the aim of outfoxing the opponent and taking them away from the safety of their opening knowledge as quickly as possible.

**5...c5 6.♗d3 d5**



**7.cxd5**

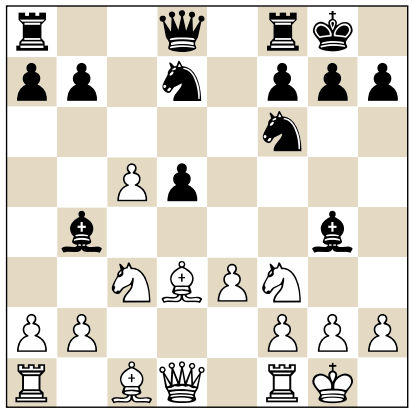
This is a new trend to avoid the main line, because White tends to get nothing after 7.0-0.

In fact, in the blitz section I faced 7.0-0 dxc4 8.♗xc4 cxd4 9.exd4 b6, but equalized easily: 10.♕e2 ♗b7 11.♖d1 ♘bd7 12.d5 ♗xc3 13.dxe6 ♗xf3 14.gxf3 fxe6 15.bxc3 ♕c7 16.♗xe6+ ♔h8 17.♕c4 ♕b7 18.♗xd7 ♘xd7 19.♕d5 ♕xd5 20.♖xd5. The endgame should not be a problem for Black. Just look at White's pawns; they are all isolated! 20...♘c5 21.♗a3 ♖xf3 22.♗xc5 bxc5 23.♖xc5 ♖af8 24.♖c7 ♖xf2 25.♖xa7 ♖c2, and a draw soon followed in Ivanchuk-So, Leuven blitz.

**7...exd5 8.dxc5 ♗g4**

I remembered that everyone plays 8...♘bd7 here, but I wanted to develop my bishop first, since this gives me extra options.

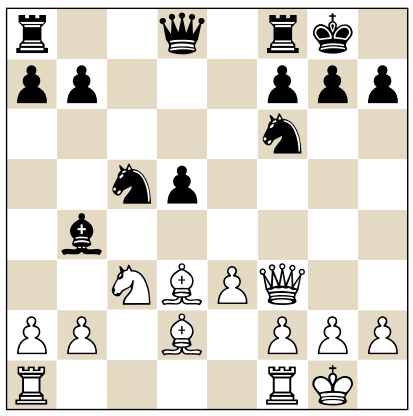
**9.0-0 ♘bd7**



**10.♗d2** If 10.♘a4 then 10...♘xc5 11.♘xc5 ♗xc5, followed by ...d4, looks like equalizing. 10.♗e2 deserves attention.

**10...♗xf3** Perhaps I had other options here, but this seemed the most sensible to me. In a rapid game there is very little time to calculate every detail, and it doesn't make sense to spend 10 minutes in the opening.

**11.♕xf3 ♘xc5**



**12.♗c2** Analysing the position now, 12.♕e2 d4 (12...♖e8 is met by 13.♗b5, followed by a3) 13.exd4 ♕xd4 14.♗c4 seems to me to be White's best option. Black is going to have to fight hard

| Leuven rapid 2017 | | cat. XXII |
|---|---|---|
| | | TPR |
| 1 So | 7 | 2993 |
| 2 Vachier-Lagrave | 6 | 2900 |
| 3 Carlsen | 5½ | 2851 |
| 4 Giri | 5 | 2821 |
| 5 Nepomniachtchi | 4½ | 2782 |
| 6 Aronian | 4½ | 2775 |
| 7 Kramnik | 4½ | 2774 |
| 8 Anand | 4 | 2733 |
| 9 Ivanchuk | 3½ | 2701 |
| 10 Jobava | ½ | 2341 |

| Leuven blitz 2017 | | cat. XXII |
|---|---|---|
| | | TPR |
| 1 Carlsen | 14½ | 3022 |
| 2 Giri | 10 | 2821 |
| 3 Vachier-Lagrave | 10 | 2818 |
| 4 Kramnik | 9½ | 2795 |
| 5 Aronian | 9½ | 2796 |
| 6 Nepomniachtchi | 9 | 2782 |
| 7 Ivanchuk | 8½ | 2760 |
| 8 So | 8½ | 2752 |
| 9 Anand | 8 | 2733 |
| 10 Jobava | 2½ | 2476 |

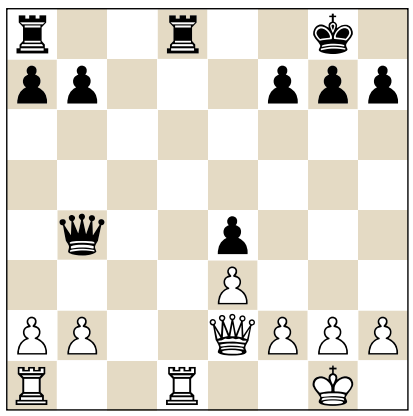
| Leuven combined 2017 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | rapid | blitz | total |
| 1 Carlsen | 11 | 14½ | 25½ |
| 2 So | 14 | 8½ | 22½ |
| 3 Vachier-Lagrave | 12 | 10 | 22 |
| 4 Giri | 10 | 10 | 20 |
| 5 Kramnik | 9 | 9½ | 18½ |
| 6 Aronian | 9 | 9½ | 18½ |
| 7 Nepomniachtchi | 9 | 9 | 18 |
| 8 Anand | 8 | 8 | 16 |
| 9 Ivanchuk | 7 | 8½ | 15½ |
| 10 Jobava | 1 | 2½ | 3½ |

to combat the pressure of White's bishop pair.

**12...♘ce4 13.♗xe4 ♘xe4**

13...dxe4 14.♕e2 is a possible option, but I prefer to recapture with the knight. In a rapid game it is good to keep the position simple and to have a clear plan. It makes finding good moves easier and quicker.

**14.♖fd1 ♕a5 15.♘xe4 dxe4 16.♗xb4 ♕xb4 17.♕e2 ♖fd8**

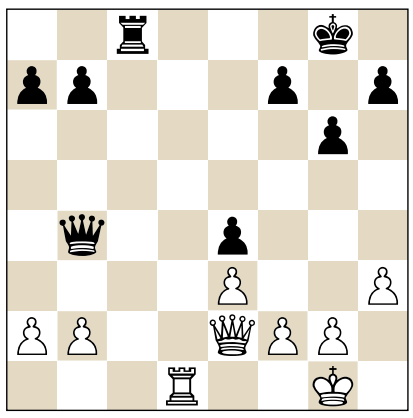


The position is almost completely symmetrical now, the only difference being my pawn on e4, which is a little overextended. If it was on e6, we would agree to a draw immediately. But now I have to be a little careful not to get that pawn cut off.

**18.h3** After 18.g3 g6 the white king would be better placed on g2 than on h2, but it does not change the position much.

**18...g6 19.♖ac1 ♖xd1+** Simplest is 19...♖d3 20.♖xd3 (20.a3 ♕b3) 20...exd3 21.♕xd3 ♕xb2, and I can't imagine how Black could lose such a position.

**20.♖xd1 ♖c8**



He controls the d-file, while I seize the c-file. In the last few moves, Magnus had started to use up his time, time that might be very valuable later on.

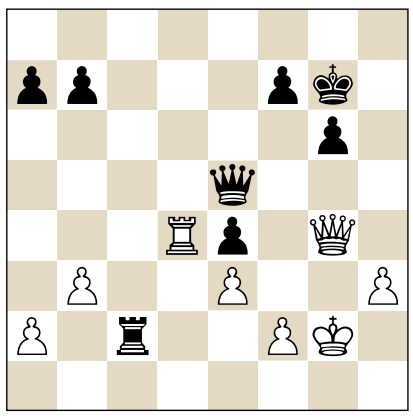
**21.b3** Preventing ...♕c4. **21...h5** Preventing ♕g4. **22.g4 ♕c5** I didn't want to let him activate his queen so easily on g4. 22...hxg4 23.♕xg4 looks easier to play for White.

**23.♔g2 ♕e5 24.♖d4**

I calculated 24.♖d7 ♕a1, when due to the idea ...♖c1 I have enough counterplay to make a draw.

**24...♔g7** We both improve our king's position. Now I can move my rook to a more active spot without having to worry about back rank issues.

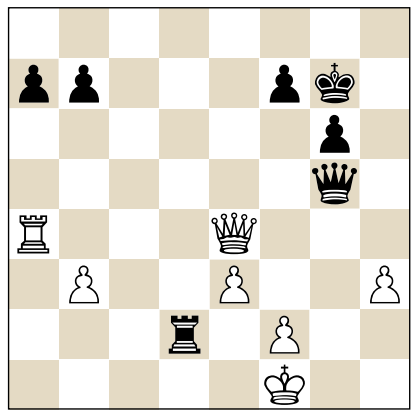
**25.♕d1 hxg4 26.♕xg4 ♖c2**



Seizing the 7th rank. When I had played this, I knew I was out of danger. I'm not sure if Magnus was still playing for a win, but I was pretty satisfied with my position. I also kept large amounts of time on my clock, just in case we ever got to a time-scramble.

**27.♕xe4** After 27.♖xe4 Black goes 27...♕d5. And after 27.a4 ♕f6 28.♕g3 ♕f5 White has many ways to draw, e.g. 29.♖c4 or 29.♖b4.

**27...♕g5+ 28.♔f1 ♖xa2 29.♖a4 ♖d2**



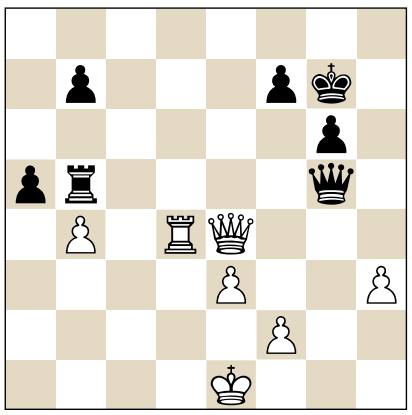
**30.♔e1** I thought the simplest way to defend was 30.♖d4.

But apparently 30.♖xa7 is more than enough to guarantee a draw. Black's attack will end up yielding no more than a perpetual.

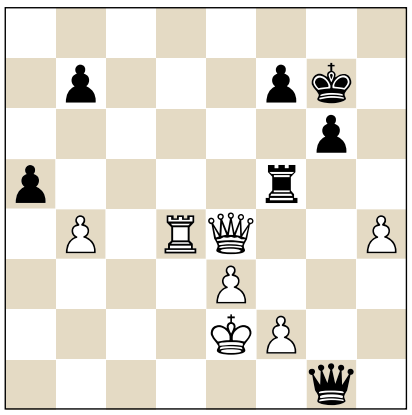
LENNART OOTES

**On his way to victory in the rapid, Wesley So also defeated the World Champion. 'I thought Magnus would go for his London killer again, but apparently he saves this one only for blitz games.'**

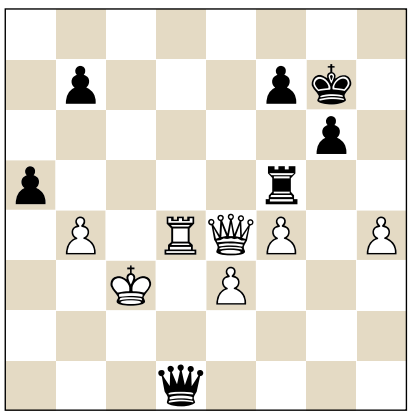
**30...♖d5 31.♖d4 ♖b5 32.b4 a5**
I did not find any move to play if White just took this pawn, but I played it anyway, since there was nothing better.



**33.h4?** After 33.bxa5 ♖b1+ 34.♔e2 ♕h5+ 35.♕g4 ♕xa5 36.♔f3 the white king escapes the checks.
**33...♕g1+ 34.♔e2 ♖f5**

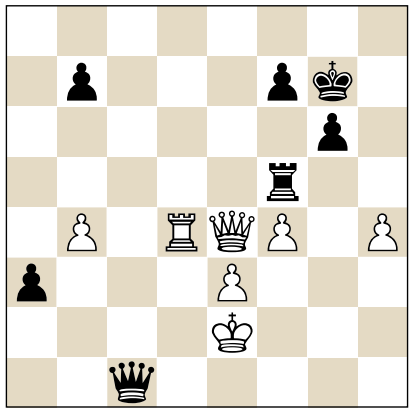


Magnus had clearly forgotten about this move. My pressure has paid off. Now he's in real danger.
**35.f4 ♕g4+** 35...♕h2+ is even better. **36.♔d3 ♕d1+ 37.♔c3**

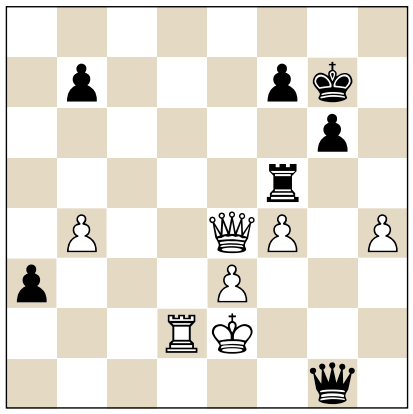


**37...♕c1+** 37...axb4+ almost leads to checkmate, but in the heat of the moment my intuition told me it was time to create a passed pawn.

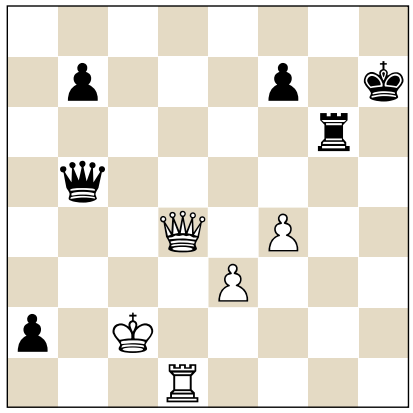
**38.♔d3 a4 39.♔e2** I had simply forgotten that his king can move back. **39...a3** Threatening to create a second queen.



**40.♖d2**
40.♖d1 ♕c8 is still much better for me. But he had missed 40.♖d8!, which is quite hard to spot. White wants to put his rook behind my passed pawn, while his queen gives check on d4. 41.♕e8 is also a threat. Black has no way to create winning chances.
**40...♕g1**
Moving my queen from one side to the other seems too nice not to be played. I am threatening the pleasing 41...a2, winning a rook.
But objectively better was 40...♖h5, and Black wins.



**41.♕c4** Now 41.♖d8! would have saved the draw. **41...♖f6 42.♕d4 a2 43.♖d1 ♕g2+ 44.♔d3 ♕c6 45.h5** After 45.♔e2, 45...♔h7 wins.
**45...♔h7!**
Unpinning my rook and not fearing any counterplay. My queen controls many important squares.
**46.hxg6+ ♖xg6 47.b5 ♕xb5+ 48.♔c2**



**48...♖g2+**
48...♕b1+ 49.♖xb1 ♖g2+ is a nice way to win, which I saw right after I made my move.
**49.♔c3 ♕b2+ 50.♔c4 ♖c2+ 51.♔d5 ♕b3+**
51...♕b5+ is even easier, but my move was enough, since Magnus resigned.
In the end I won the rapid section, which was very important for the final tournament standings, because it boosted my confidence with a TPR of 3010, and pushed me into eventual second place overall.
As the lowest-rated blitz player except for one, I am happy to say I didn't totally embarrass myself against the strongest players in the world and was able to pull it all together. Not perfectly, of course, because I'm not perfect, but better than total brain freeze.

■ ■ ■

After the rapid part Magnus Carlsen was trailing So by one-and-a-half points, which meant he had to make up three points in the blitz to catch up with the leader. A steep task, even considering that blitz is not exactly So's forte, but well before the end of the first day of blitz it was clear that Carlsen was on fire. In the end he scored 14½/18 with a 3022 TPR! (Remember that earlier in this issue Erwin l'Ami described Carlsen's 2944 in the Norway Chess blitz as 'other-worldly'?)

Carlsen's second Peter Heine Nielsen analysed two special games from Leuven. A most unusual opening 'experiment' in his rapid encounter with Kramnik, and a wildly creative blitz effort against Vachier-Lagrave that got Garry Kasparov in raptures.

NOTES BY
**Peter Heine Nielsen**

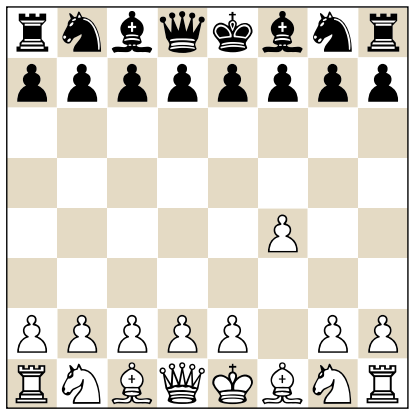
**Magnus Carlsen**
**Vladimir Kramnik**
Leuven rapid 2017 (5)
Bird's Opening

LENNART OOTES

**Magnus Carlsen took Vladimir Kramnik to task for saying 'We don't study Larsen in Russia, because we consider him a coffee-house player.'**

In an interview Nigel Short referred to an interesting dinner conversation he had had with the two players of this game at the closing dinner of Norway Chess in Stavanger. Speaking about influences, Magnus warmly mentioned Larsen, which immediately sparked Kramnik's remark, 'We don't study Larsen in Russia, because we consider him a "coffee-house" player.' During a visit in Buenos Aires, Larsen himself once mentioned to me that he felt somewhat misrepresented stylistically in Kasparov's books. As I see it, Larsen was a positional player who tried to create situations in which he could rely on his ability to outplay his opponents.

**1.f4!?**



Despite Magnus's flirtations with the Dutch Defence, playing the Bird was a first.

**1...d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6!?**

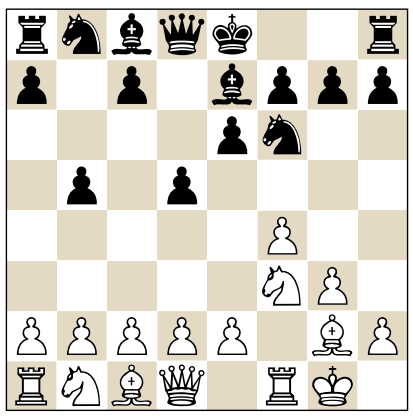
Even in such back alleys like this, Kramnik seems to have thoughts of his own. Against Vovk he had played 2...♗g4, generally considered to be a good antidote, but Henrik Danielsen, in his 1.f4 videos dubbed the 'Polar Bear System', recommends 3.e3 ♘d7 4.h3! ♗xf3 5.♕xf3, followed by g4.

**3.g3** Aiming for a Leningrad structure. Larsen was successful in the 1964 Amsterdam Interzonal, beating Spassky after 3.e3 g6 4.b4!?, but Kramnik would probably have prevented queenside expansion with 3...e6.

**3...e6!?**

The 'normal' way is to fianchetto Black's dark-squared bishop, but in the 2014 Candidates', Kramnik played 1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.e3!? vs. Svidler, and here he tries a similar approach a tempo down.

**4.♗g2 ♗e7 5.0-0 b5!?**



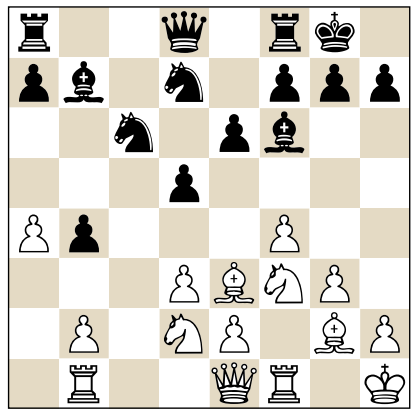
In his youth Kramnik played similarly with White, but with the bishop on g2. It might look less solid than ...b6, but why not grab space as well as preparing ...♗b7 ?

**6.d3 ♗b7 7.♕e1?! c5 8.c3 0-0 9.a4 b4 10.cxb4 cxb4 11.♔h1 ♘c6**

**12.♗e3**

A typical plan, since ...♘g4 can be met by ♗g1.

**12...♘d7 13.♘bd2 ♗f6 14.♖b1**



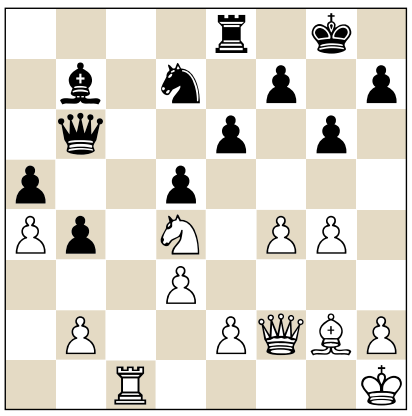
**14...♖e8?!** A good common-sense move, but not enough to keep Black's opening advantage.

14...♕a5! threatens the a4-pawn, highlighting the drawback of White's 7th move. Magnus intended 15.♕d1!, which would have minimized the damage, still with a playable position for White.

**15.♘b3 a5 16.g4 g6 17.♕f2**

White has now comfortably equalized. **17...♗g7 18.♘bd4 ♘xd4 19.♗xd4 ♖c8 20.♖bc1 ♗xd4 21.♘xd4 ♖xc1 22.♖xc1 ♕b6**

The position has clarified, and Black is ready to exchange rooks on the c-file, with a draw as the likely result. Magnus's play so far is a matter of liking his approach or not. From here on in, however, it's indisputably in a class of its own.



**23.♖f1!**

Vacating the open file, which anyway was only suitable for exchanges, White hints at the possibility of playing f5 next. After 23...♖c8 24.f5 gxf5 25.gxf5 e5 the computer upholds the black position, but only with complex tactics: 26.f6 ♕xd4 27.♕f5 ♖d8 28.♕g5+ ♔f8 29.♗h3!? ♔e8 (29...♕e3!?) 30.♗e6 ♘f8! 31.♗xf7+ ♔d7!. However, 25.♗h3!? or the calmer 24.h4!? are very playable for White in a more non-forcing manner.

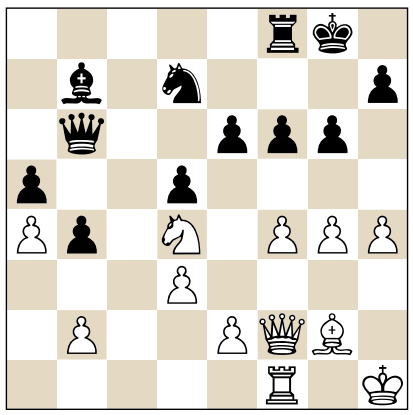
**23...f6?!**

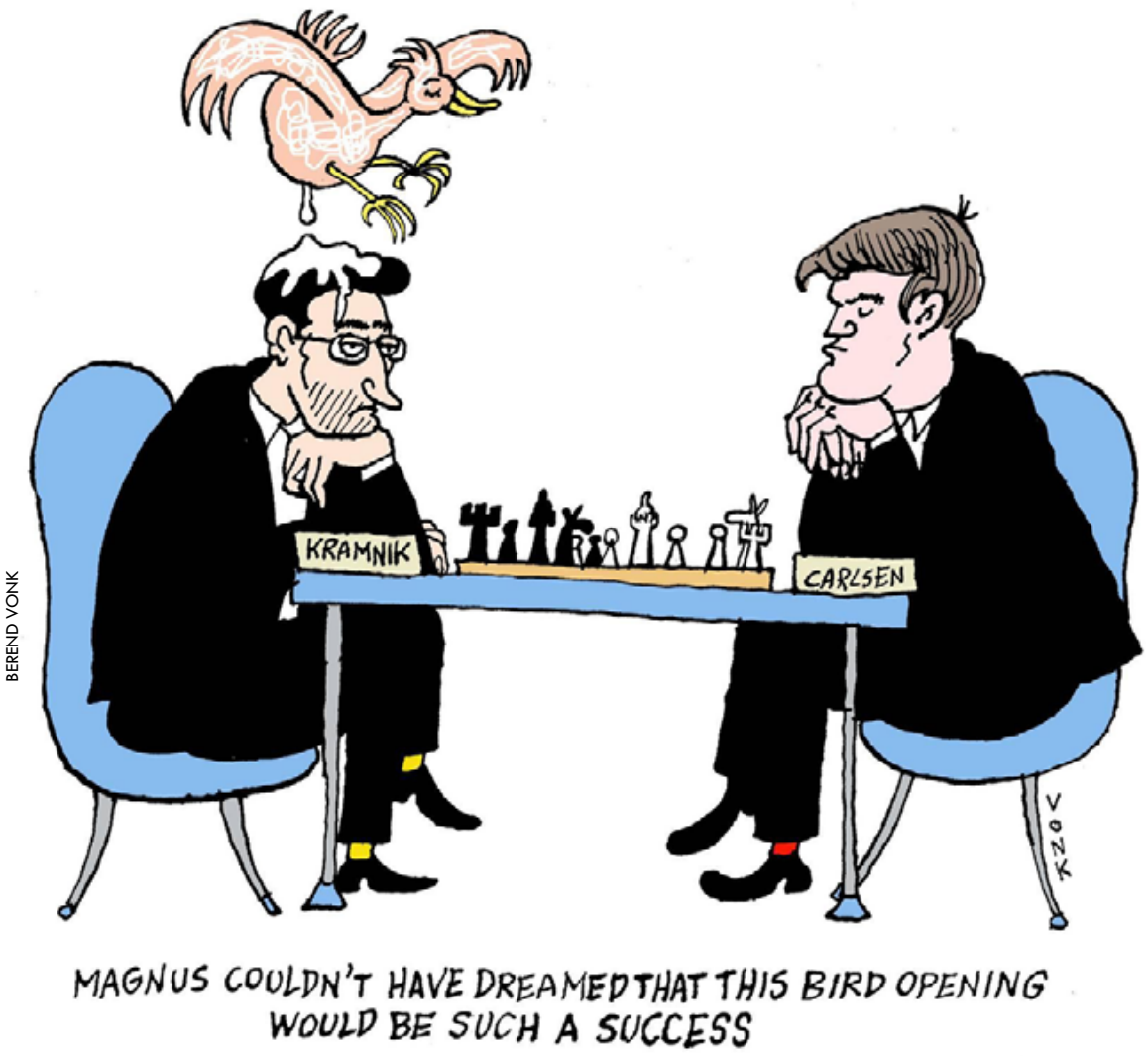
Prophylaxis against a white f5, now having the perfectly safe reply ...e5, but it weakens the black structure.

**24.h4!?**

Grabbing space and hinting at playing either h5 or g5.

**24...♖f8**





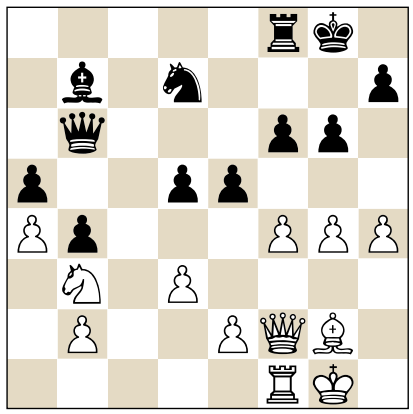

**25.♔g1!**

My favourite move of the game (except maybe move 1!). White's previous moves very much indicated kingside action, but now, with the game unfolding, it feels as if Black's queenside is critically weak.

**25...e5**

Consistent. 25...♖c8 would have been fine with the black pawn on f7, but here 26.g5 creates strategic problems.

**26.♘b3!**

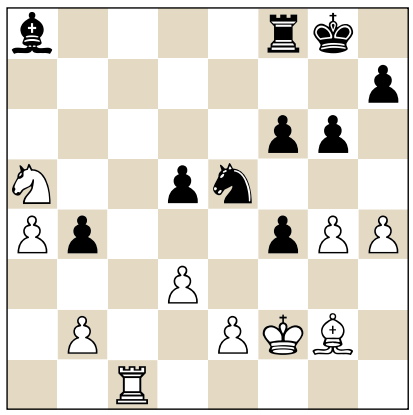


**26...♕xf2+?**

The losing mistake. 26...♗a8! still fights well, as 27.♖c1 e4, which is obviously pleasant for White, is maybe not as bad for Black as it looks. Now, however, that conclusion is very much reversed.

**27.♔xf2 exf4 28.♘xa5 ♗a8 29.♖c1 ♘e5**

With material equal and g4 under attack things might not look that hopeless at first sight, but White's next move clarifies the situation.

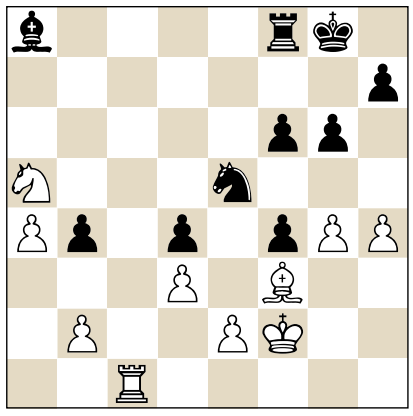


**30.♗f3!**

Sealing off the kingside and making Black's two extra pawns there consid-

erably less mobile than White's a-pawn. Now ♖c7, ♘b3-d4, followed by pushing the a-pawn, become easy automatic moves. So Kramnik tries his last chance to complicate matters.

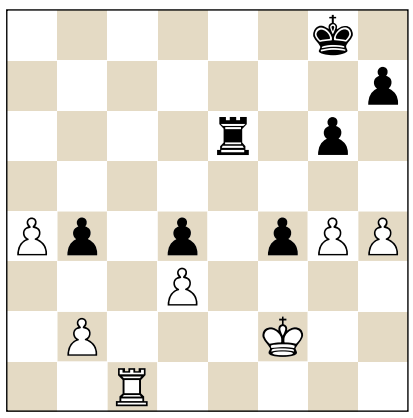
**30...d4**



**31.♘c4**

31.♘c6!? is the computer line that wins after 31...♗xc6 32.♗xc6 ♘xg4+ 33.♔f3 ♘e5+ 34.♔xf4, when Black cannot go 34...♖c8 due to 35.♗d5+, and if 34...♘xc6 35.♖xc6 the rook ending is an easy win despite material being still equal for the moment. But b4 and d4 are weak, and the white a-pawn is the passed pawn with potential.

**31...♗xf3 32.♘xe5 ♗xe2 33.♘d7 ♖f7 34.♘xf6+ ♖xf6 35.♔xe2 ♖e6+ 36.♔f2**



As in the comment above, everything favours White, making it a trivial win.

**36...♔f7 37.a5 g5 38.hxg5 ♔g6 39.♖c5 f3 40.♔xf3 ♖e3+ 41.♔f4 ♖xd3 42.a6 ♖d1 43.♖a5 d3 44.♔e3**

And here Kramnik resigned.

NOTES BY
**Peter Heine Nielsen**

**Magnus Carlsen**
**Maxime Vachier-Lagrave**
Leuven blitz 2017 (12)
English Opening

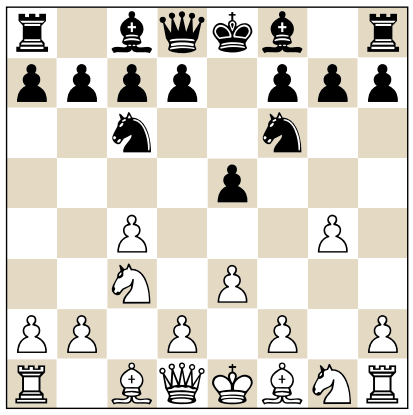
With a look at the tournament standings [where Carlsen had a clear lead – ed.], as well as keeping Day 5 in Paris in mind, where Vachier-Lagrave staged a great come-back in the blitz, this blitz game in Round 12 might have been the perfect moment for solidity and consolidating. But the World Champion said that in Leuven he wanted to loosen up a bit, so here we go!

**1.c4 e5 2.e3 ♘f6 3.♘c3 ♘c6**

In the rapid Anand had played 3...♗b4 here. Magnus was about to play an excellent game, but lost the thread after Black defended well, and had to count himself lucky for saving that game.

**4.g4!?**

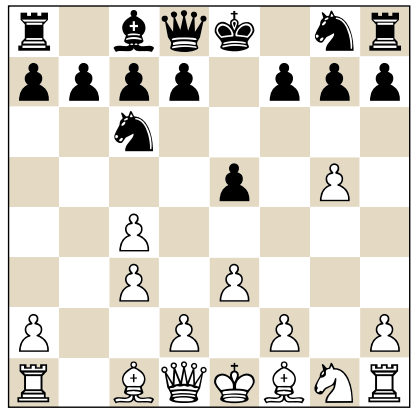
If you ever should want to play the Grob, this is probably as good as it gets. This is not exactly a recommendation.



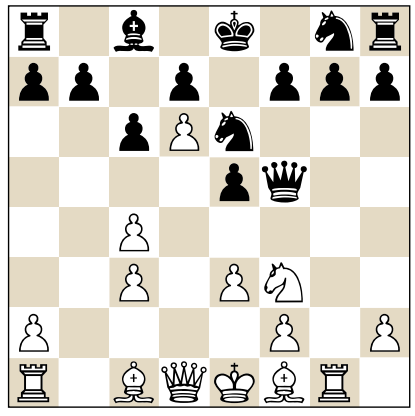
**4...♗b4** Aronian has played 4...h6 5.♗g2 d6 against Rapport, and Short-Docx went 4...d5 5.g5 d4 6.gxf6 dxc3, both leading to atypical and balanced positions.

**5.g5 ♗xc3 6.bxc3 ♘g8**

MVL's concept definitely contains logic: the g5-pawn is weak and e.g. 7.h4 h6 is excellent for Black. White's pieces are in their starting positions, but in the following moves Carlsen unleashes them with amazing energy.



**7.d4! ♕xg5 8.d5 ♘d8 9.d6 c6 10.♘f3 ♕f5 11.♖g1 ♘e6**

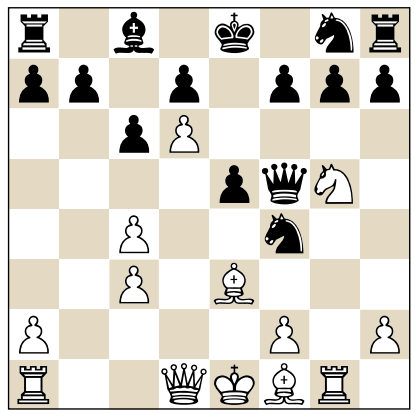


This is the kind of position in which one of the sides will end up busted. Give Black the time to consolidate, say ...♘f6 ...b6 ...♗b7, and White is doomed. Alas:

**12.e4!** Speed matters more than material, and already a pawn down Magnus accelerates his development by shedding another one.

**12...♕xe4+ 13.♗e3** Now 14.♗d3, trapping the black queen, is threatened, and if 13...♘f4 then 14.♖g5 f6 15.♘d2 ♘d3+ 16.♗xd3 ♕xd3 17.♖xg7 gives White a winning attack, so Maxime has to retreat.

**13...♕f5 14.♘g5 ♘f4**



A logical move, stopping 15.♗d3 as

well as averting the threat of 15.♘xe6, followed by 16.♖xg7.

**15.♗xf4!**

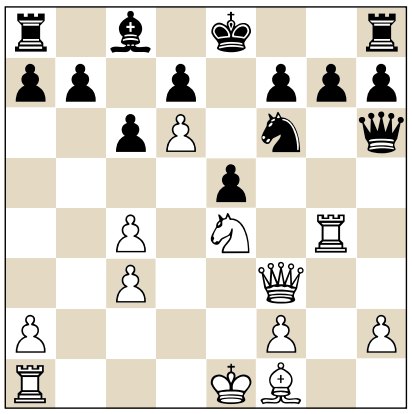
Again, it is not a matter of 'small' factors like the number of pawns or the bishop pair. Black is not allowed to consolidate, whatever the cost in traditional values.

**15...♕xf4 16.♖g4 ♕f6 17.♘e4 ♕h6 18.♕f3**

The game has its first 'slow' moment, with White not having a direct threat. Quite logically Black uses it to catch up in development and to try and swap the dominating knight on e4.

But oddly enough, the better move would have been 18...g6!?, intending to put the queen on g7. My computer comes up with the following line: 19.♖g5 ♕g7 20.♕g3 ♔f8 21.♖xe5 f6 22.♖a5 b6 23.♖a3, which is a strange mix of logic and absurdity.

**18...♘f6**



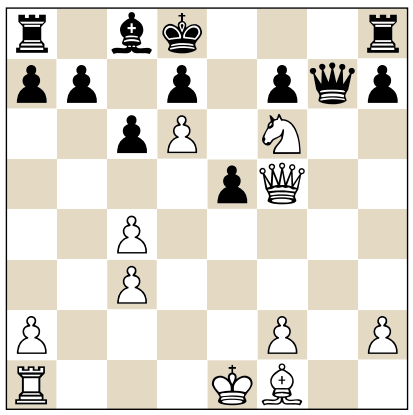
**19.♖xg7**

Tempting, and very much in the style of this game, but even so 19.♘xf6+ was objectively better, since after 19...♕xf6 20.♕xf6 gxf6 21.c5! White has excellent compensation for the two sacrificed pawns, an instructive example being: 21...b6 22.♗c4 ♗b7 23.♖b1!. Now, if 23...b5 24.♗b3, Black's bishop ends up locked in and White will eventually collect a number of black pawns.

**19...♕xg7?**

19...♔f8! was better, since 20.♘xf6 ♔xg7 21.♘h5+ ♔f8 22.c5 e4! defends well, e.g. 23.♕f5 ♖g8, when it is difficult to sufficiently strengthen the white attack. Less fancy, but better, would have been 20.♖g3 ♘xe4 21.♕xe4 ♕xd6 22.♕h4, which keeps sufficient counterplay to balance the position.

**20.♘xf6+ ♔d8 21.♕f5**



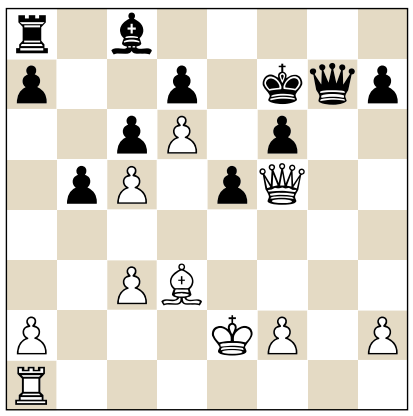
Now, however, Black's position is hopeless. If 21...♕f8 then 22.♖d1! (22.♕xe5?! ♕e8! fights) is completely paralysing, rendering Black practically unable to move any piece.

**21...♖e8!? 22.♘xe8 ♔xe8 23.c5**

Logical, hemming in Black's position, but the more direct 23.f4 exf4 24.♔d2, followed by 25.♖e1+!, would have been just as strong.

**23...b5 24.♗d3 f6 25.♔e2 ♔f7**

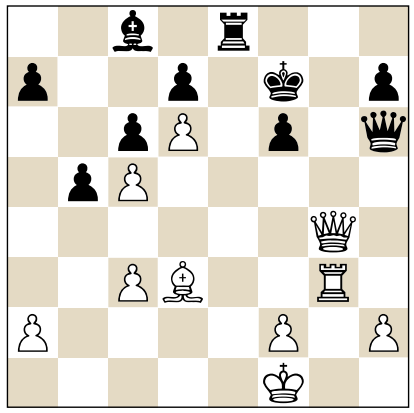
White has numerous ways to win, but the following move has beauty to it, almost mathematically solving the puzzle of how to get the white rook on the g-file as fast as possible.



**26.♖h1!! ♖b8 27.♔f1! ♕g6 28.♕f3 ♕h6 29.♖g1 ♗a6 30.♕g4!**

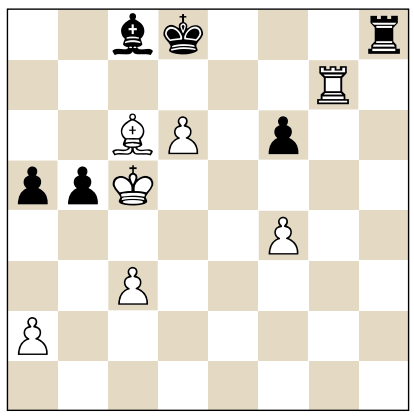
Preventing 30...♖g8, as well as nailing Black down to the defence of the d7-pawn.

**30...♖d8 31.♖g3 e4 32.♕xe4 ♖e8 33.♕g4 ♗c8**



**34.♔g2** 34.♗c2! would have ended things here and now, but the result was never in doubt anyway.

**34...♕g5 35.♕f3 ♕d5 36.♕xd5+ cxd5 37.♗xh7 ♖e5 38.f4 ♖e2+ 39.♔f1 ♖xh2 40.♗g8+ ♔f8 41.♗xd5 ♖h8 42.♔f2 ♗a6 43.♔e3 ♔e8 44.♔d4 ♔d8 45.♖g7 ♗c8 46.c6 dxc6 47.♗xc6 a5 48.♔c5**



Black resigned. An extraordinary game. The sequence from move 7 to 27 is impressively energetic and creative in itself, but being part of a blitz game obviously makes it something quite special.

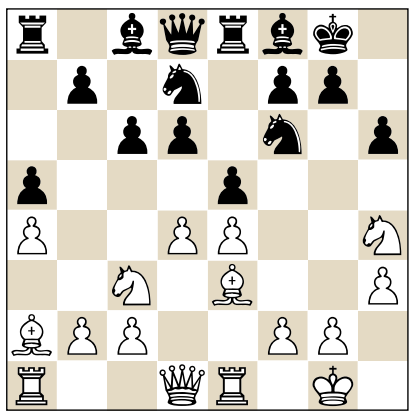
■ ■ ■

With such an abundance of games it is impossible to do justice to all the highlights, and there is comfort in the thought that many of them are marred by grave mistakes and oversights. We will round off with a number of games annotated by Anish Giri. Our contributing editor played well in Leuven and finished overall fourth, so there was good reason to ask him to put the emphasis on his own games, which included a remarkable opening novelty against Aronian (rapid) and the only game the World Champion lost in the blitz!

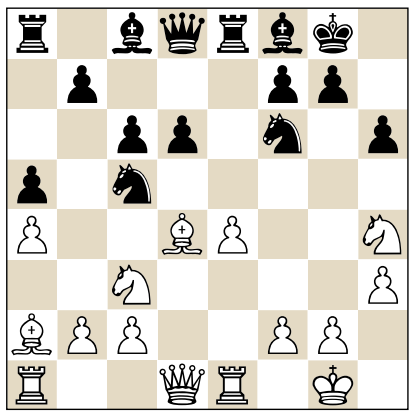
NOTES BY
**Anish Giri**

**Maxime Vachier-Lagrave**
**Vassily Ivanchuk**
Leuven rapid 2017 (1)
Philidor Defence

Here is a smooth victory by the third finisher of the tournament, one of the favourites, blitz chess specialist and one and only MVL.
**1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 e5 4.♘f3 ♘bd7 5.♗c4 ♗e7 6.0-0 0-0 7.a4 a5 8.♖e1 c6 9.♗a2 ♖e8 10.h3 ♗f8 11.♗e3 h6 12.♘h4**
So far, a pretty standard Philidor position.



**12...exd4** This was the right moment to strike in the centre with 12...d5! (13.♘f5 dxe4). It appears that Black can solve his opening problems in this way, so the standard ♘h4 shot was somewhat premature.
**13.♗xd4 ♘c5**
Also a standard operation, but now White gets a very good and easy-to-play endgame.

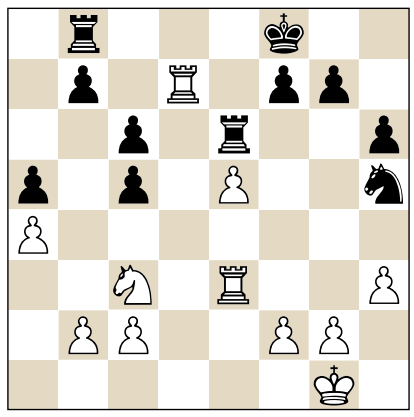


**14.♗xc5! dxc5 15.e5 ♕xd1 16.♖axd1 ♘h5 17.♘g6!**

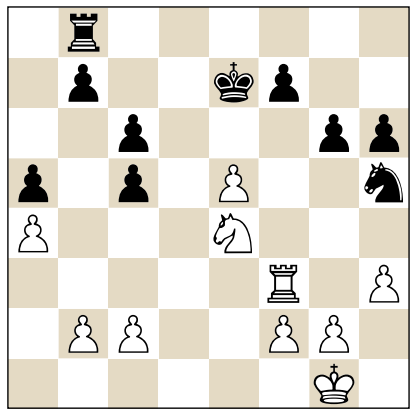
NEW IN CHESS

**The one and only MVL finished in third place in Leuven.**

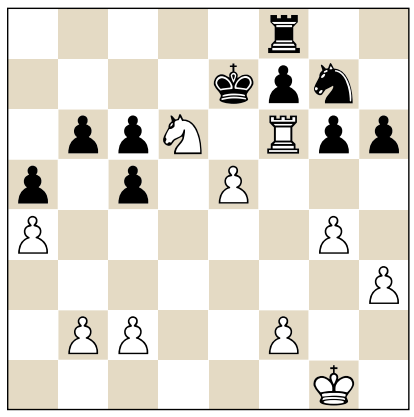
Taking away Black's only hope, his bishop pair.
**17...♗e6 18.♘xf8 ♔xf8 19.♗xe6 ♖xe6 20.♖d7 ♖b8 21.♖e3!**



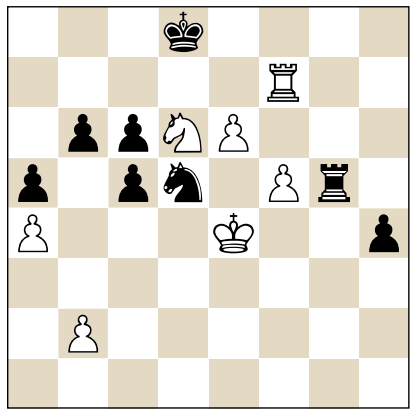
Preparing for ...f6 and introducing the idea of ♖f3.
**21...g6 22.♖f3 ♖e7 23.♖xe7 ♔xe7 24.♘e4!**



Black is busted, and even though his position bears some slight resemblance to the Berlin Endgame, he is not only unable to stop White's pawn avalanche, but also to create any counterplay.
**24...b6 25.g4 ♘g7 26.♘d6 ♖f8 27.♖f6!**



Now f4-f5 will decide the issue.
**27...♘e6 28.f4 g5 29.f5 ♘d4 30.♔f2!** The rest is just as smooth as the entire game! **30...♘xc2 31.♖xh6 ♘b4 32.♔e3 ♘d5+ 33.♔e4 ♖d8 34.h4! gxh4 35.g5 ♖g8 36.♖h7 ♖xg5 37.♖xf7+ ♔d8 38.e6**



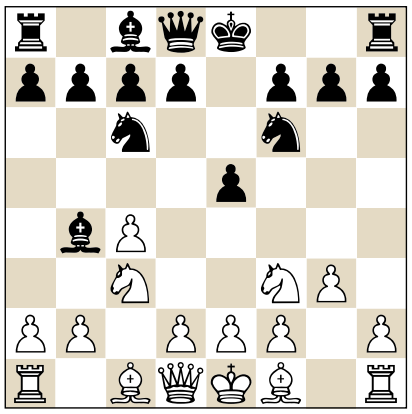
Knockout! 1-0.

NOTES BY
**Anish Giri**

**Anish Giri**
**Levon Aronian**
Leuven rapid 2017 (3)
English Four Knights

I had lost my previous game and had a sad score of ½/2 on my birthday. Not really knowing what I was hoping for, I played 1.c4 in my third-round game against Levon Aronian, my self-proclaimed pastor.

**1.c4 ♘f6 2.♘c3 e5 3.♘f3 ♘c6 4.g3 ♗b4**

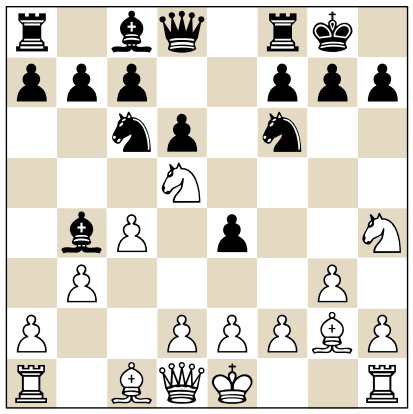


I was surprised to see this variation on the board, since it had gone completely out of fashion after ruining Vishy Anand's Candidates' tournament in Moscow last year (he lost crucial games with it to Nakamura and Caruana, falling short of catching Karjakin, despite his excellent performance with the white pieces).

**5.♘d5 e4**

This system requires a lot of knowledge and memory, and I was still expecting Levon to jump out of the theoretical battle with 5...♗c5. But he was obviously in for it, and fortunately I had brought a bomba with me to the game, which I had almost forgotten about.

**6.♘h4 0-0 7.♗g2 d6 8.b3!?**

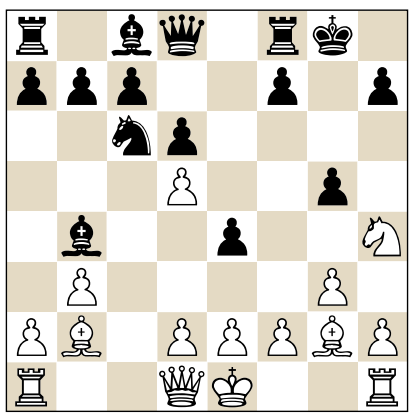


A brilliant novelty by Robin van Kampen, who found it while well into his retirement. As they say in Russia, you can't drink away your talent.

**8...g5!?**

I was very surprised to see this. Caught out by a novelty like 8.b3, Levon goes all the way and allows me to demonstrate my main idea. Black, of course, has trouble protecting his e4-pawn, but there were safer ways to try to fight for equality here. As my opponent later confessed, he thought that he was following his analysis here. Indeed, 8...g5 and the ensuing mess looks very familiar and had occurred in a slightly different position in the afore-mentioned game Nakamura-Anand from the 2016 Candidates, amongst other sub-lines of this system.

**9.♗b2 ♘xd5 10.cxd5**



**10...♘b8?**

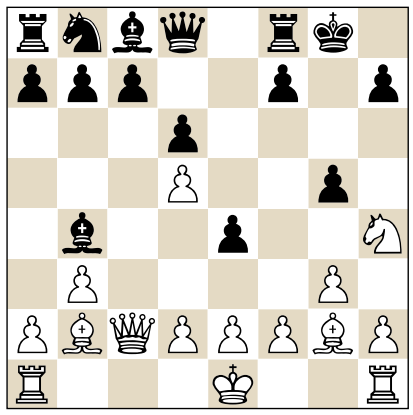
I was pleasantly shocked to see this retreat. One doesn't need to possess Levon Aronian's attacking abilities to see that the black king is doomed here.

I think Black was afraid that after 10...♘e5 he would still be stuck with a weak king and no compensation, since White is able to rescue the doomed h4-knight with the 11.f4! shot.

After 10...♘e5!, 11.f4 is indeed the way for White, with or without including a3 and ...♗a5. Black has various ways of responding here. Besides the obvious moves, 11...♘g4!? also comes to mind. With very precise play Black should probably be able to come out of this mess with some measure of equality, but it would certainly help to have analysed this position for a couple of hours.

**11.♕c2!**

Fortunately, I paused for much more than a second, noticing that this is stronger than the obvious capture of the e4-pawn, because 11.♗xe4 allows 11...f5!, and even though the black king is still in a great deal of trouble, he at least wins a tempo on the defence.



**11...gxh4**

11...f5 was the move I had expected here, but now White can blast open the g-file with the spectacular shot 12.g4! (12.a3 ♗c5 13.♕c3 was my initial thought, but then I noticed the desperate, yet strong defence 13...♔f7!) 12...gxh4 13.gxf5, and with the a1-h8 diagonal as well as the

**'Fortunately I had brought a bomba with me to the game, which I had almost forgotten about.'**

g-file wide open, Black's position is hopeless. All of his pieces are totally undeveloped and out of sync.

**12.♗xe4 ♖e8**

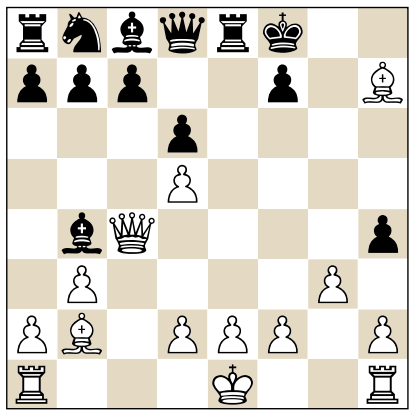
12...f5 13.gxh4! gives White an important tempo on the attack. Black is lost.

But 12...f6 13.♗xh7+ ♔h8 seemed to me to be the best defence, although Black's position looks totally lost. After even the simple 14.gxh4!? the fact that White has three pawns for the piece is good enough for the greediest of attackers, but the main joy will come from the fact that Black will slowly but surely get mated. The slow plan is 0-0-0, ♖hg1 (♗g6 if need be), etc. etc.

**13.♗xh7+ ♔f8 14.♕c4!**

LENNART OOTES

**Anish Giri shows Maurice Ashley how he added lustre to his twenty-third birthday by defeating his 'self-proclaimed pastor' Levon Aronian.**



For some reason I managed to make a couple of good moves in this game. The queen is swiftly transferred to f4, from where it will create deadly threats.

**14...♘a6**

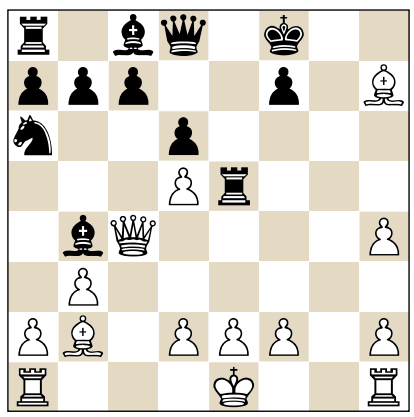
I was thinking about all manners of ...♕g5, but there is really no follow-up after White picks up the b4-bishop. For instance, 14...♕g5 15.♕xb4 ♖xe2+ 16.♔xe2 ♕h5+ would give some cool counterplay on the light squares... if Black's queenside had been developed.

**15.gxh4!**

Pretending to stop ...♕g5, open the g-file and threaten the deadly ♕f4, while in fact satisfying my desire to restore the material balance.

15.♕f4 ♖e5 16.gxh4 transposes to the game.

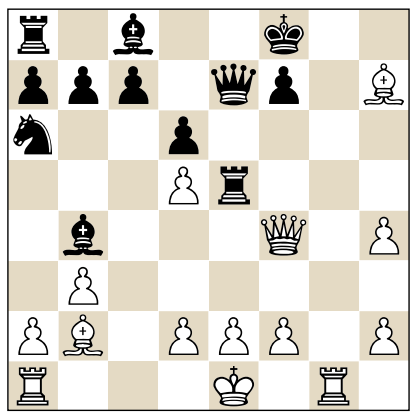
**15...♖e5**



**16.♕f4!?** 16.♖g1 ♕f6 17.0-0-0 was good too, but I wanted to allow Black the pleasure of giving me a check.

**16...♕e7** 16...♖xd5 would stop the immediate mate, but after 17.♖d1, White's ♖g1 is still coming, and Black has no defence.

**17.♖g1!**

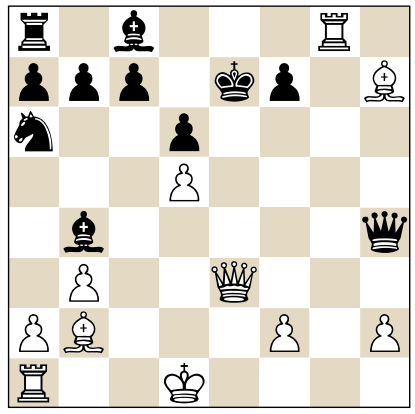


Pointing out the real threat in the position.

**17...♖xe2+ 18.♔d1 ♖xd2+**

The fact that 19.♔c1 will win just as easily now suggests that Black might as well have resigned at this point. I assumed, however, that my opponent wanted me to checkmate him on my birthday.

**19.♕xd2 ♕xh4 20.♖g8+ ♔e7 21.♕e3+**



**21...♗e6**

Black is so lost that I honestly hadn't seen this move and was expecting 21...♔d7 22.♕e8, mate, which would wrap up my birthday gift in very pretty gift wrapping-paper.

Had I known that the packaging was torn, I would have gone 21.♕e2+, which would have forced resignation, since there wouldn't be a single check left for Black after 21...♗e6 22.dxe6.

**22.dxe6 ♕h5+ 23.♔c1 ♖xg8**

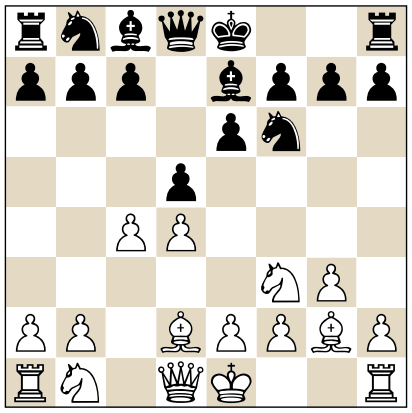
# ‘As Crocodile Genna sings, “Unfortunately, birthdays are only once a year...”’

NOTES BY
**Anish Giri**

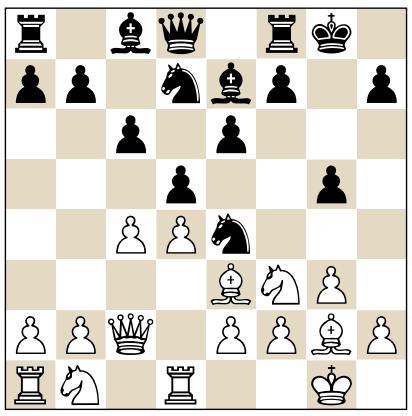
**Anish Giri**
**Magnus Carlsen**
Leuven blitz 2017 (7)
Bogo-Indian Defence

Just before this game I was told by my former trainer Vladimir Tukmakov that Magnus had not only scored 5½/6 in the Blitz so far, but that he had also done so in a very convincing and impressive manner.
To cheer him up, I told him that last year, in Leuven, I had managed to upset Magnus after he had won the blitz event with three rounds to spare. But neither myself nor my legendary collocutor would have dared to place a bet on this unlikely result to repeat itself.

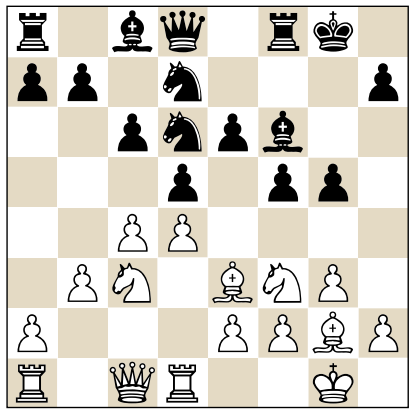
**1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 d5 4.♗g2 ♗b4+**
Obviously, my opening choices in most of my encounters with Magnus are far too random and irrational to be explained. A couple of moves later, though, I realized that my ambitious opponent would probably aim for a Stonewall structure, which has become popular again after Erwin l’Ami spit out the truth about it on a record (or rather a DVD).
**5.♗d2 ♗e7 6.♘f3**



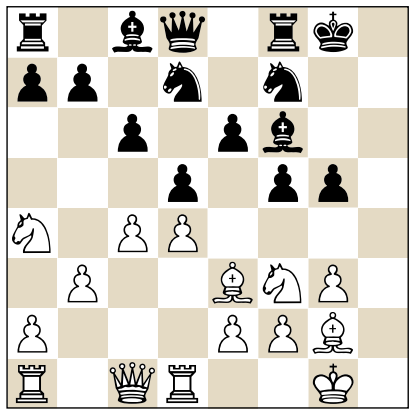
**6...c6**
6...0-0 7.0-0 ♘bd7 8.♕c2 ♘e4 9.♗f4 c6 10.♘c3 g5 11.♗e3 occurred in the modern classic Eljanov-Carlsen from Wijk aan Zee last year. It is slightly different from this game, but I was familiar with some motifs. That game proceeded with 11...♘d6 12.b3 ♘f5.
**7.0-0 0-0 8.♕c2 ♘bd7 9.♖d1 ♘e4 10.♗f4 g5 11.♗e3!?**



**11...f5** There is no need to withdraw the knight, unlike in the Eljanov-Carlsen game, and the ...♘d6-♘f5 motif disappears with the rook already on d1.
11...♘d6 12.b3 would most likely transpose, since 12...♘f5 makes no sense here.
**12.♘c3 ♘d6 13.b3 ♗f6 14.♕c1**



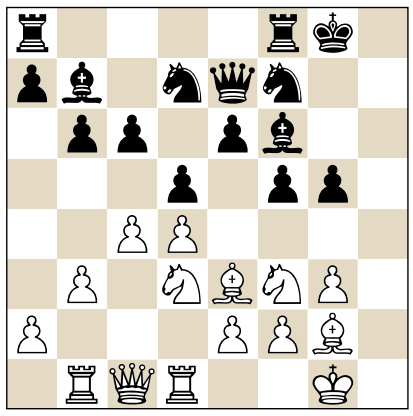
From here onwards, I was focused on the g5-pawn, which looks like a strong point in Black’s position, but will in fact end up being pretty vulnerable.
14.♗c1!?-a3 is an alternative plan suggested by the computer, but it didn’t occur to me at this point.
**14...h6 15.h4!?**
Obviously a very risky decision, but it worked, so what the hell!
**15...♘f7 16.hxg5 hxg5 17.♘a4!**



I wish I had come up with this peculiar knight manoeuvre all by myself, but I had actually seen this motif in this pawn structure before. At the same time, there seems to be no way for Black to checkmate me on the h-file. And indeed, why would he? I’ve got my fianchetto bishop!
**17...♕e7 18.♘b2 b6**
It is hard to come up with a direct attacking plan on the white kingside

here, so Magnus decides to get all his pieces into play and develop the c8-bishop.

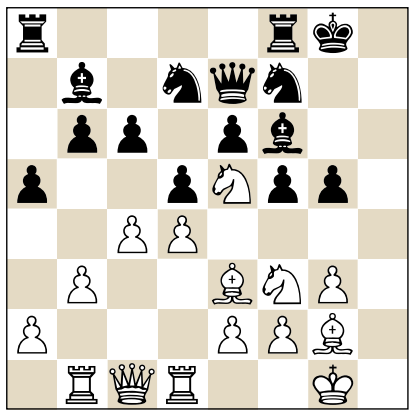
**19.♘d3 ♗b7 20.♖b1!!**



I was rather lucky that Magnus assumed this move to be in preparation for b4, whereas the only thing I was thinking about was how to prepare the ♘de5 jump in the best possible way. In fact, all I wanted was for my rook not to be left hanging after the mass exchanges on e5.

**20...a5?!** Walking straight into it.

**21.♘de5!**

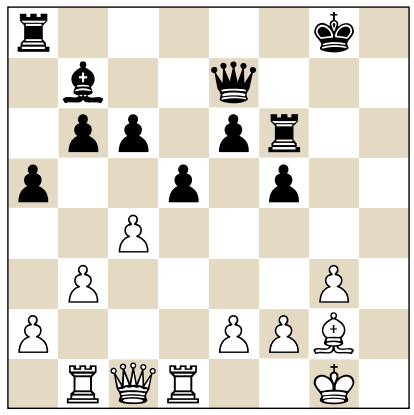


**21...♘dxe5?!** 21...♗xe5! was objectively stronger. Now Black might still hold the balance, although his position looks pretty shaky, especially in a blitz game: 22.♘xe5 (22.dxe5!? g4 23.♘h4 ♘fxe5 is a pawn, although I'd take White any blitz game of the week) 22...♘dxe5 23.dxe5 c5 24.cxd5 ♗xd5 25.♗xd5 exd5 26.♖xd5 f4!, creating just enough counterplay, since 27.gxf4 will be met with 27...♕e6!.

**22.dxe5 ♘xe5 23.♘xe5 ♗xe5 24.♗xg5**

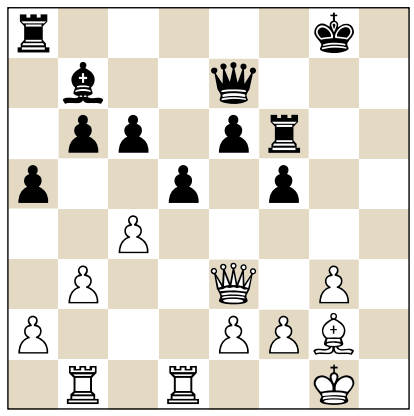
I had analysed Gelfand-Ding Liren for the previous New In Chess issue and felt that I was enjoying a much better version of that here. A rare case of New In Chess magazine actually helping humanity.

**24...♗f6 25.♗xf6 ♖xf6**



**26.♕e3?!** This move looks great, touching the weakened b6-pawn, but it allows some surprising counterplay.

Instead, 26.cxd5! cxd5 (26...exd5 27.♖d4!) 27.♖d4! gives White a positional advantage, since he is likely to ask Black some unpleasant questions on the queenside with b3-b4!.

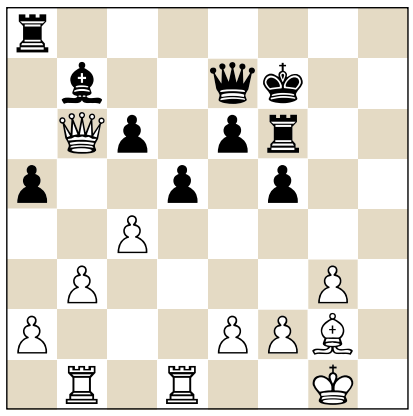


**26...♔f7?**

This was played instantly and kind of impressed me, but before I knew it, my hand just grabbed the free pawn.

Best was 26...f4! 27.gxf4 (27.♕xb6 ♖a6 28.♕d4 c5 is a much better version for Black, who now has some real counterplay; enough for equality) 27...♕g7! (27...♖g6 28.f5 is what we probably both assumed) when White can easily parry the threat on the g-file; but after 28.♖d3 ♖g6 29.♕h3 ♖f8 Black gets some real counterplay, e.g.: 30.♕h2 ♖ff6 31.♖bd1 c5 32.cxd5 ♗xd5 33.♖g3 ♖xg3 34.fxg3 ♖h6 35.♗xd5 ♖xh2 36.♗xe6+ ♔f8 37.♖d8+ ♔e7 38.♖d7+ ♔xe6 39.♖xg7 ♖xe2 40.♖g6+ ♔f5 41.♖xb6 ♖xa2, with a draw. This is what a comment looks like when you don't get your New In Chess analysis cut by the editor.

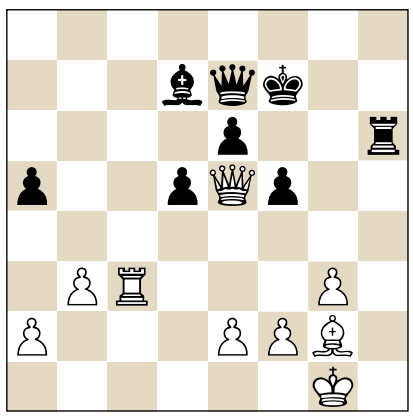
**27.♕xb6!**



**27...♖a6?** Losing two tempi and essentially the game.

As desperate as it was, 27...f4 was obviously a must. Probably realizing that his move was not as good as he initially assumed, Magnus decided to play another random move. The best thing to do here is probably to deploy the b1-rook with 28.♖bc1-♖c3. Black doesn't have any real kingside initiative here, as long as the g3-pawn is firmly protected.

**28.♕e3 ♖a8 29.♖d4** The rest is a matter of conversion and rook grabbing. **29...♖h8 30.cxd5 cxd5 31.♖c1 ♖fh6 32.♕e5 ♖c8 33.♖xc8 ♗xc8 34.♖d3 ♗d7 35.♖c3**



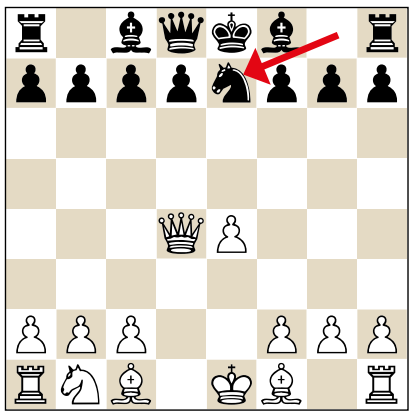
**35...♖h8** And here's the promised rook grabbing: **36.♕xh8!**

Black resigned.

I went on to beat Wesley So in my next game, whereas Magnus went on to win the tournament. To each his own! ■

# The Simple Scotch

Jeroen Bosch



**‘My attention was drawn to what could be described as the simplest (or most naive) solution to the Scotch problem.’**

The contribution of Garry Kasparov to modern opening theory can hardly be overestimated. Kasparov was single-handedly responsible for hauling the ancient Scotch Game back into the modern limelight when he played it against Karpov in the 14th World Championship match game in 1990. Kasparov showed the way in numerous games in the complicated lines following 4...♘f6 5.♘xc6 bxc6 6.e5 ♕e7 7.♕e2 ♘d5 8.c4 and 4...♗c5 5.♗e3 ♕f6 6.c3. He demonstrated his masterly play in these lines even more impressively as late as 2016 in the St. Louis Ultimate Blitz tournament.

Looking for an antidote to the venerable Scotch, my attention was drawn to what could be described as the simplest (or most naive) solution to the Scotch problem: simply taking the knight on d4, followed by manoeuvring the king’s knight to c6 to attack the white queen. I was inspired by a recent win by Predrag Nikolic.

**Nico Zwirs**
**Predrag Nikolic**
Germany Bundesliga 2017

**1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 exd4 4.♘xd4 ♘xd4 5.♕xd4**

The obvious disadvantage of Black’s system is that he has conceded space and has drawn White’s queen forward into a dominating central position.

**5...♘e7**

The main advantage of Black’s simple play (apart from avoiding reams of complicated theory) is that he has managed to exchange a pair of knights (easing his space disadvantage) and will gain a tempo on the queen.

Please note that in practice another move order is also used: 4...♘ge7, when 5.♘c3 ♘xd4 6.♕xd4 ♘c6 and 5.♗c4 ♘xd4 6.♕xd4 ♘c6 transpose to our main lines.

**6.♗e3** White anticipates Black’s next move by developing his bishop to a natural square and reserving the d2-square for his queen (so as not to obstruct the queen’s bishop).

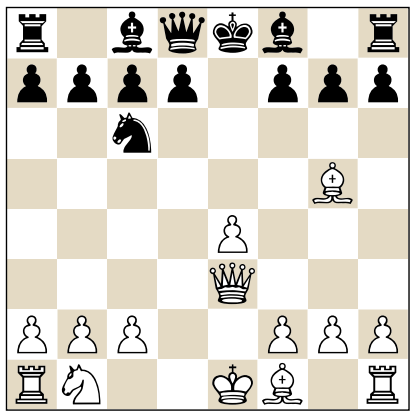
Apart from 6.♗e3, White has two main moves to anticipate 6...♘c6: 6.♗c4 and 6.♘c3. We will look at both these moves in more detail.

There are some old games by Howard Staunton (with both colours!) that deserve to be mentioned:

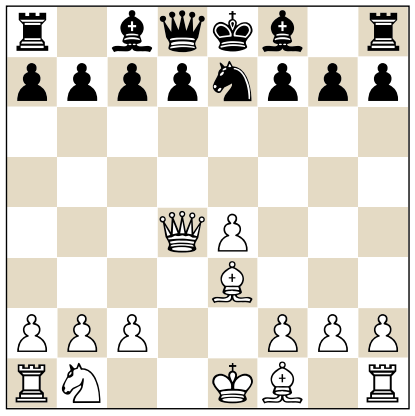
– No good is 6.♗d3 d6 (stronger is 6...♘c6! 7.♕e3 ♗b4+) 7.0-0 ♘c6 8.♕e3 ♗e7 (8...g6) 9.♗d2 ♗f6 10.♗c3 0-0 11.♗xf6 ♕xf6 12.♘c3 ♘e5 13.♘d5 ♕d8 14.♗e2 c6 15.♘f4?! f5 16.exf5?! ♗xf5 17.♕b3+ d5, and Black took over in Cochrane-Staunton, London 1841.

– 6.♗g5 ♘c6 7.♕e3 (note that 7.♗xd8? ♘xd4 wins for Black, while 7.♕d2 ♗e7 8.♗xe7 ♕xe7 9.♘c3 d6 is very little for White; two sets of light pieces have already been exchanged. After 7.♕d2 a more interesting option is 7...♗b4!? 8.♘c3 – 8.♗xd8,

with further trades – 8...♗xc3! 9.bxc3 f6 10.♗h4 ♕e7 11.♗d3 d6, and this is at least equal for Black, Hamdouchi-Collas, Mulhouse 2011)



7...♗e7 8.♗xe7 ♕xe7 9.♘d2?! (9.♘c3!) 9...d6 10.♗d3 ♗e6 11.0-0 0-0 was balanced in Staunton-NN, London 1841. Please note that in the diagrammed position 7...♘b4 is not a bad zwischenzug, nor is 7...♗b4+ 8.c3 (8.♘c3 ♗xc3+ 9.bxc3 f6) 8...♗e7, when White no longer has the convenient route of ♘b1-c3-d5.



**6...♘c6 7.♕d2**

After 7.♕a4 the game Van der Wiel-Upton, London 1996, demonstrates the main problem in this line: 7...♗e7 8.♘c3 0-0 9.0-0-0, and square d5 is controlled by White.

Black should therefore play 7...♕f6 (true, 7...b6!? 8.♘c3 ♗c5 has a right to exist) to provoke 8.c3 (8.♘c3 ♗b4 9.♗d2 – not 9.♕b3 ♘d4! – 9...0-0) 8...♗d6!?, with interesting play.

**7...♕f6**

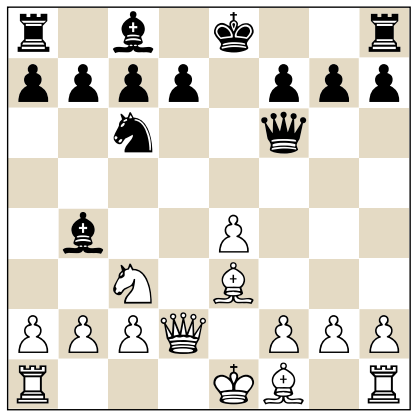
This seems more accurate than 7...♗b4 8.♘c3 0-0 (8...♕f6 is Zwirs-Nikolic) 9.a3 ♗a5 10.♗d3 d6 11.0-0-0 ♘e5 (11...♕f6! to take on c3 next is fine for Black. Obviously White cannot use square d5 now: 12.b4?! ♗b6 13.♘d5? ♕a1 mate) 12.h4 ♗e6 13.h5 b5? (13...h6 is still fine) 14.h6! g6 15.♗xb5, and Black had too little for the pawn in Smeets-Sokolov, Dutch Internet championship 2011. Black can improve on move 11, so 7...♗b4 seems fine, but the problem with this move order is 8.c3! ♗e7 (or 8...♗a5 9.♘a3 ♗b6 10.♘c4 ♗xe3 11.♘xe3 d6 12.♗d3 0-0 13.f4, with a slight plus, Azmaiparashvili-Godena, Reggio Emilia 1996) 9.c4 d6 10.♘c3 f5 11.♗e2 0-0 12.0-0 fxe4 13.♘xe4 ♗f5 14.♘c3 ♕d7, which occurred a few times in practice. Due to his space advantage and his control over d5 White is slightly better.

**8.♘c3**

White had nothing after 8.c4 ♗b4 9.♘c3 d6 10.♖c1 0-0 11.f3 ♕h4+ (even better is 11...♕g6 12.a3 ♗xc3 13.♖xc3 f5) 12.♗f2 ♕e7 13.♗e2 f5 ½-½, Magem-Campora, Cala Galdana 1999.

**8...♗b4**

Black's opening can already be called a success. He has managed to trade one pair of knights and has protected his weak d5-square with this pin.



**9.♗d3**

White can question the bishop, but in the resulting structure he certainly does not gain an edge: 9.a3 ♗xc3 10.bxc3 d6 11.♖b1 0-0, Radecke-Medancic, Bad Wiessee 1998.

**9...b6** Nikolic aims for an interesting position. Black has many comfortable options at this stage: 9...d6, 9...0-0, and 9...♗xc3 amongst them.

**10.0-0 ♗xc3!**

Not 10...♗b7?! 11.♘d5!.

**11.bxc3** Black is comfortable even after 11.♕xc3 ♕xc3 12.bxc3 d6.

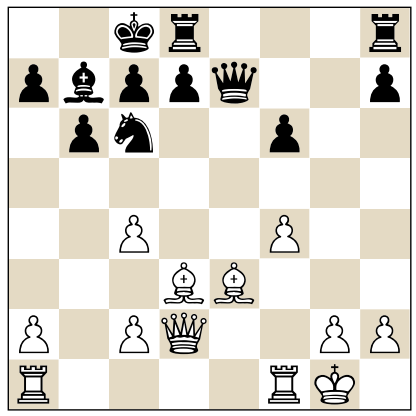
**11...♗b7 12.f4** White is gaining space, but with this move and his next he is weakening the long diagonal.

**12...♕e7 13.e5 0-0-0! 14.c4 f6!?**

The simple way to play is 14...d6. It also made sense to wait with 14...♖he8, preparing ...f6 or ...d6.

**15.exf6 gxf6**

15...♕xf6 16.c5, and White gets attacking chances too.



**16.♖fe1** White can also take the other rook to e1: 16.♖ae1 ♖hg8, when 17.♗xb6? (17.♖f2) is a faulty combination because of 17...♕d6! (after 17...♘e5 18.fxe5 ♖xg2+ 19.♕xg2 ♗xg2 20.exf6 ♕f7 21.♔xg2 axb6 the f-pawn gives White enough counterplay for a draw) 18.♗e3 (or 18.♗f2 ♖xg2+! 19.♔xg2 ♘e5+ 20.♔h3 ♘f3 21.♕e3 f5, with a huge attack) 18...♘d4, and Black is nearly winning.

**16...♖hg8 17.♗f1**

Here 17.♗xb6? fails to 17...♘e5.

**17...f5 18.♖ab1**

The point of Black's previous move was 18.♗xb6?! ♕b4!.

**18...♕f6 19.c5 d5?!**

19...♘a5!, preparing ...♘c4 tricks and ...♕c6, was best.

**20.cxb6 axb6 21.c3?**

This proves Nikolic (and his 19th move) right. Prophylaxis in the form of 21.♗f2 was called for, when Black still goes 21...d4.

**21...d4! 22.cxd4 ♘xd4** And since 23.♔h1 is still met by 23...♘f3, White is forced to take on d4, which leaves him horribly placed.

**23.♗xd4 ♖xd4 24.♕c3 ♕d6**

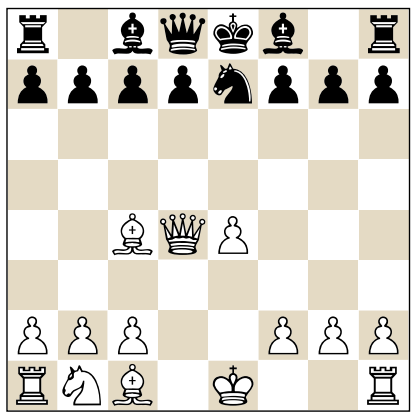
Winning material, with a contin-

uing attack. White resigned after the time-control.

Thumbs up for 4...♘xd4 so far, but as I mentioned above, 6.♗c4 (Variation I) and 6.♘c3 (Variation II) are more critical.

## Variation I

**6.♗c4**



**6...♘c6 7.♕d5** Threatening mate, and the point of 6.♗c4.

7.♕d1 ♗b4+ 8.c3 ♗a5 9.0-0 0-0 10.f4 d6 11.♘d2 ♗e6 12.♗d5 ♗b6+ 13.♔h1 ♗xd5 14.exd5 ♘e7 is similar to the pawn structure that often arises in the Ponziani. White needs another pair of minor pieces to lay claim to an edge. The game Baklan-Lobzhanidze, Schwäbisch Gmünd 2000, was quickly drawn.

**7...♕f6** Defending f7 and placing the queen on an active square at the same time. 7...♗b4+!? 8.c3 ♕e7 9.0-0 ♗c5 10.♗g5 f6 11.♗f4 d6 was pretty solid in Pribyl-Keitlinghaus, Stribrna Skalice 1993.

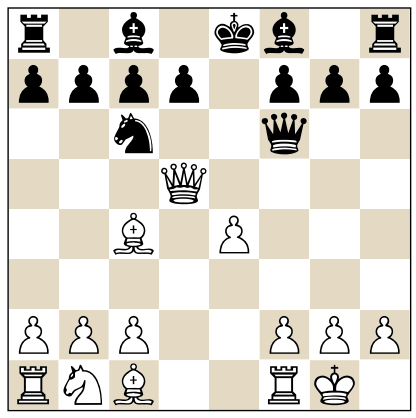
**8.0-0**

Castling is best. Some alternatives:

– 8.♗g5 ♕g6 9.♘c3 ♗b4 10.♗d2 d6 11.f4 ♗e6, and Black was doing well in Feygin-Degraeve, Germany 1999.

– 8.f4 b6, unclear, is an old analysis by Ivan Sokolov. The engines are quick to indicate that 8...♘b4 9.♕d2 d5! is strong. Black has a real initiative after 10.exd5 (10.♗xd5 ♗g4, followed by taking on d5 and castling queenside) 10...♗f5 11.♗b3 0-0-0.

– 8.c3?! ♗e7 (8...b6 9.0-0 ♗b7 is pretty good, too) 9.0-0 d6 10.f4 ♗e6 was completely fine for Black in NN-Staunton, London 1842.



**8...♘e5!** Black has to look for counterplay. **9.♗e2!** This is more testing than 9.♗b3 c6 10.♕d2 (10.♕d1 ♗c5; 10.♕a5 b6 11.♕d2 ♗c5 12.♘c3 ♗a6 13.♖d1 0-0-0, and White would be well-advised to go for equality with 14.♕f4) 10...♗c5 11.♘c3 a5! 12.♕f4 ♕xf4 13.♗xf4 d6 14.♖ad1 ♔e7 15.♖fe1 f6 16.h3 g5 17.♗g3 h5 was good for Black, who boasted a clear edge by now, Stock-Kayumov, Dubai 2006.

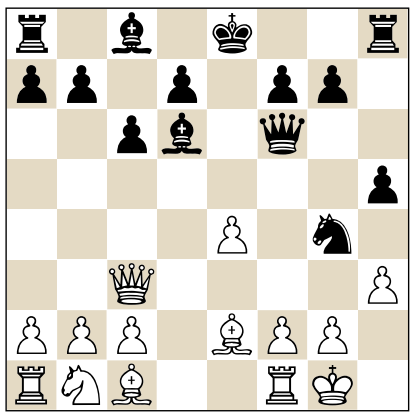
**9...c6 10.♕b3 h5!?**

Black is seeking active play on the kingside, and is anticipating f2-f4.

**11.♕c3 ♘g4**

11...g5!? 12.♗xg5!? ♕xg5 13.f4 ♕e7 14.♕xe5 ♕xe5 15.fxe5 ♗c5+ 16.♔h1 ♗d4 17.c3 ♗xe5 18.♖f5 d6 19.♖xh5 ♖xh5 20.♗xh5 ♗e6, and due to his two bishops Black had almost full compensation for the pawn, Van der Wiel-Sokolov, Groningen 1994.

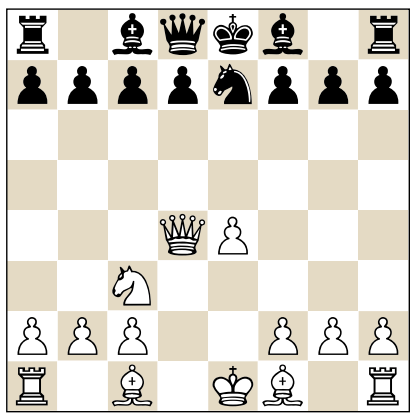
**12.h3 ♗d6**



**13.♕xf6** Instead, 13.hxg4 ends in a perpetual after 13...hxg4 14.♕xf6 ♗h2+. **13...♘xf6 14.♗d3 0-0 15.♘c3 ♖e8 16.♗g5 ♗e5 17.♖ae1 d6 18.♘d1 ♗e6 19.a3** And draw agreed in Palac-Degraeve, Makarska 1997. Make no mistake, Black is at the very least not worse after 19...♘d7, followed by ...♘c5.

## Variation II

**6.♘c3**



**6...♘c6** The queen has several squares to retreat to. The best option is square e3, when White prevents ...♗c5, does not obstruct queenside castling, and may switch her majesty to the kingside along the third rank.

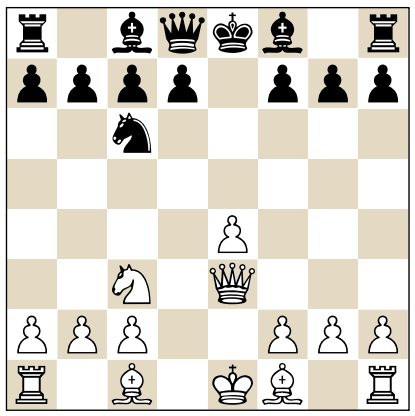
**7.♕e3**

White gains nothing after 7.♕d1 ♗b4 8.♗d2 0-0 9.♗d3 ♘e5 10.0-0 d6 (with natural moves Black has obtained a very decent position) 11.f4 ♘xd3 12.cxd3 ♗c5+ 13.♔h1 f5 14.♕f3 ♗d7 15.♖ae1 ♗c6 16.♘d5 ♕d7 17.♗c3 fxe4 18.dxe4 ♗b5, and Black won material, Arias-Beliavsky, San Cristobal 2012 (the move order in this game was 4...♗b4+ 5.♘c3 ♘ge7 6.♘xc6 ♘xc6!).

After 7.♕d3, since White allows Black to develop his bishop to c5, why think twice here? 7...♗c5 8.♕g3! 0-0 9.♗g5! f6 10.♗h6 ♕e7 11.0-0-0 (11.♘d5!? ♕xe4+ 12.♗e2 ♕g6 13.♕xg6 hxg6 14.♘xc7) 11...d6 12.♗c4+ ♔h8 13.♘d5 ♕d7 14.♗e3 ♗xe3+ 15.♕xe3, Van den Doel-Sokolov, Netherlands 1995. White is indubitably a bit better, but Black's position is quite solid. After opposite castling anything can happen (in the game Black managed to win). However, the alternative on move 11 is a bit worrying.

Therefore I would like to call your attention to the 'clever' 7...♘b4!? 8.♕e2, and only now 8...♗c5. White will gain a tempo on the knight, but the

clear gain is that the queen does not end up on g3. After 9.a3 ♘c6 10.♗e3 ♗xe3 11.♕xe3 0-0 12.0-0-0 d6 we have another position with opposite castling. White is better, but Black is fairly solid, and pawn a3 may turn out to be a target after ...a6 and ...b5-b4.

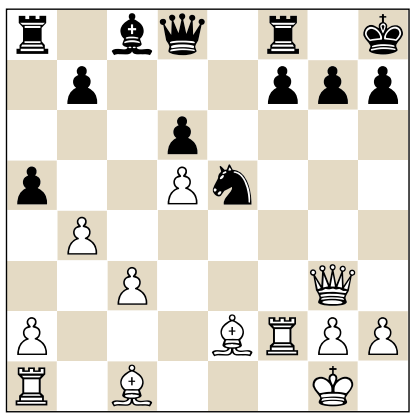


After the text Black faces a choice. 7...g6 was successfully played by Spassky, but 8.♕g3! (Ortiz-Castrillon, Bogota 2013) is annoying. Therefore I don't trust 7...g6, which leaves either 7...♗b4 or 7...♘b4 (set-ups starting with 7...♗e7 or 7...d6 are passive).

## Variation IIa

**7...♗b4 8.♗d2**

Or 8.♗c4 0-0 9.0-0 d6 (9...♘e5; 9...♖e8) 10.♘d5 ♗c5 11.♕g3 ♔h8 12.c3 ♘e5 13.♗e2 (13.♗b3 c6?! 14.♗e3! ♘d7 15.♘f4 ♗xe3 16.♕xe3 Amonatov-Kabanov, Novokuznetsk 2008; stronger are 13...♗e6 or 13...a5) 13...c6 14.b4! (otherwise Black is completely OK – 14.♘e3 a5 or 14.♘f4 f5) 14...♗xf2+ 15.♖xf2 cxd5 16.exd5 a5 is unclear, according to Hjartarson.



This is based on the game Oll-Tkachiev, Moscow 1995. In the game there followed 17.bxa5 ♖xa5?! 18.c4 b6? 19.♗e3 ♗a6 20.♗d4 f6 21.♕b3, and White had a clear edge. Black should have played 17...♕xa5 18.c4 f6, when he is not worse.

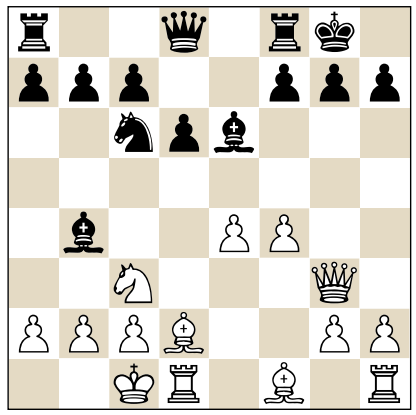
**8...0-0 9.0-0-0**

9.♗c4 d6 10.0-0 (10.0-0-0 ♗e6) 10...♗e6 11.♘d5 ♗xd2 12.♕xd2 was equal in Handoko-Kagan, Genting 1995.

**9...d6 10.♕g3!** Once more directing the queen to this square, which is quite annoying for Black.

**10...♗e6** Perhaps 10...♔h8 is more accurate, since moving the king at some point seems essential after 10.♕g3.

**11.f4**



**11...f5** Keitlinghaus, who is an expert in this system, has opted for the more solid 11...f6 here, when 12.♘d5?! allowed further trades and a quick draw (Sax-Keitlinghaus, Feldbach 1997).

**12.a3 ♗a5 13.♗d3 ♕d7 14.♖he1**

This is the right rook. After 14.♖hf1?! ♖ae8 15.♖de1 ♘d4 16.♕h4 c5! 17.exf5 ♗xf5 18.♕g3 b5 Black maintained the initiative in Degraeve-Flear, Montpellier 1996.

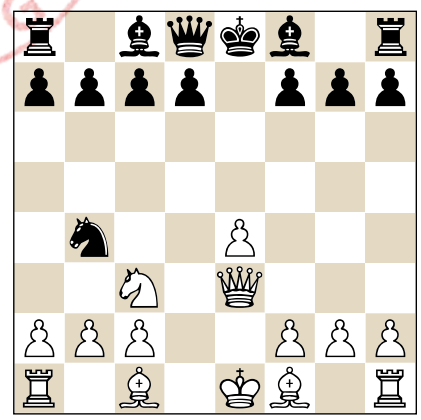
**14...♖ae8**

After 14...♕f7 15.♕f3 ♘d4 16.♕f2 c5 17.♘b5 ♗xd2+ 18.♖xd2 ♘xb5 19.♗xb5 a6 a draw was agreed in Vandevoort-Lobzhanidze, Belgium 2002. White has a slight but pleasant edge after 20.♗f1. After the text-move Black is not yet out of the woods either:

**15.exf5! ♗xf5 16.♖xe8 ♖xe8 17.♘d5! ♗xd2+ 18.♖xd2 ♖f8 19.♗xf5 ♖xf5 20.♕b3! ♖f7 21.♕xb7**, with a winning position in Kotsur-Shchekachev, Smolensk 1997. Black should therefore play differently on move 10 or 11.

## Variation IIb

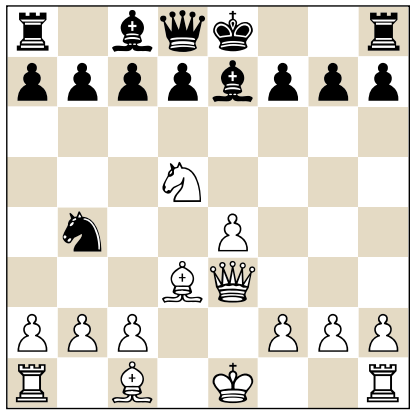
**7...♘b4**



**8.♗d3** Here 8.♕e2 ♗c5 9.a3 ♘c6 10.♗e3 transposes to 7.♕d3 ♘b4 8.♕e2 ♗c5.

**8...♗e7** Simple and more solid was 8...♘xd3+ 9.♕xd3 ♗c5 10.♗e3 ♗xe3 11.♕xe3 b6 12.0-0-0 ♗b7 13.♖d3 0-0 14.♖hd1 ♗c6 15.♕f4 ♖e8 16.♘d5 d6 17.f3 ♗xd5 18.♖xd5 f6, Borocz-Keitlinghaus, Budapest 1997.

**9.♘d5** Or 9.♗d2 0-0 10.0-0-0 ♘xd3+ 11.♕xd3 d6 12.♘d5 ♗e6 13.♗c3 ♗xd5 14.♕xd5 ♗f6, and Black successfully liquidated into an equal position in Borocz-Keitlinghaus, Budapest 1998.



**9...♘xd3+** It would be simpler to play 9...♘xd5 10.exd5 0-0. **10.♕xd3 0-0 11.♗d2 ♖e8** 11...d6, followed by 12...♗e6, is best. **12.0-0-0 d6 13.♗a5! b6 14.♗c3 ♗f8 15.♕g3!** And the great Yugoslav attacking player came under attack in Schmidt-Velimirovic, Polanica Zdroj 1964.

In conclusion, while I believe that 6.♘c3 is the most challenging option, I hope I have indicated sufficient improvements for Black for you to keep it simple versus the Scotch! ■

An unfortunate clash with the Grand Chess Tour seriously affected the World Teams Championship in Khanty-Mansiysk. Lacking their top stars, Olympiad champions USA couldn't play a role of significance, while Russia's 'second choice' failed to threaten the ultra-solid squad of defending champions China. **ADHIBAN BASKARAN** played Board 2 for India and was our man on the spot.

Do you know where Khanty-Mansiysk is located? I guess it's a silly question... if you are a chess player or an avid follower of our ancient game! But it's not the same for everyone else. Many gave me puzzled looks when I announced that I would be travelling there for the World Team Championship. I would read their minds and add 'It's in Russia!'

Personally I was happy to return to Khanty seven years after my only earlier visit, for the 2010 Olympiad. In the meantime, they have organized so many chess events here – including four World Cups – that organizing the World Teams was child's play for them. There was a great opening ceremony with song and dance, and there was a hilarious moment when one of the speakers confused the translator. The speaker proudly announced that Khanty-Mansiysk was the best city in the world, a fact that everyone totally agreed on, except, it seemed, for the translator. Huge bursts of laughter erupted when the translator said, 'Sorry, can you repeat this?' But even when the sentence was repeated, the translator didn't get it and failed to translate it.

The organization was top-notch, and every problem that any team had was dealt with immediately. One of the best things was that in the hotel they allotted entire sectors to each team, which was good for team bonding and for 'ice fights' after the event! The championship was held in the modern building of the Ugra Chess Academy, which has a nice hall for playing and fine rooms for game analysis and commentary.

Due to the clash with the Grand Chess Tour, the World Teams missed out on top stars like World Champion Magnus Carlsen, Kramnik, So, Aronian, Caruana, Mamedyarov (if we're talking about the 2800 club) and many other elite players, but it still turned out to be a pretty exciting and nail-biting thriller to the end, an all-out fight between China and Russia that was only decided in the last round.

China was the top-seed, and they lived up to expectations by putting in a fine performance and taking gold again after their win in Tsaghkadzor, Armenia, two years ago. I managed to catch Ding Liren for a quick word about his and his team's performance and the 'secret' behind their victory, and this is what their first board said: 'Li Chao was our hero here, with an amazing plus-5 on Board 4! He managed to wipe out his bad performance at the Olympiad and scored important wins against Russia and Poland, which helped us to clinch the title. And our team didn't lose a single

On top of the world again: China's coach Xu Jun, Yu Yangyi, a rightly proud Li Chao, Ding Liren and Wei Yi.

# China flawless in World Teams

## Top-seeds keep 'Russia B' at bay

game, although we were very close to losing many times... We dug in and defended well, like a goalkeeper who won't allow any goals! As for myself, I came here in high spirits having won the recent Grand Prix. But most importantly we played high-level chess. I feel that was the key!'

Indeed, Li Chao's contribution cannot be overrated. I remember that Harikrishna once compared Li Chao to a bull, that once he starts his rampage it will be difficult to stop him! Let's have a look at his game against Vladimir Fedoseev, from the key match against Russia, with his own notes.

NOTES BY
**Li Chao**

**Li Chao**
**Vladimir Fedoseev**
Khanty-Mansiysk 2017 (7)
Ruy Lopez, Berlin Defence

This game was played in Round 7. At this point, we (China) were one match point behind Russia, so our goal and my goal was definitely to win. This was probably the most important game in my life so far.

**1.e4!?** A surprise for Fedoseev. I have mostly played 1.d4 in recent years, especially in big tournaments. Although I have not played 1.e4 for a long time, I was fully prepared for the variations that Vladimir usually plays, including the Berlin.

**1...e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♘xe4 5.d4 ♘d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♘f5 8.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 9.h3**

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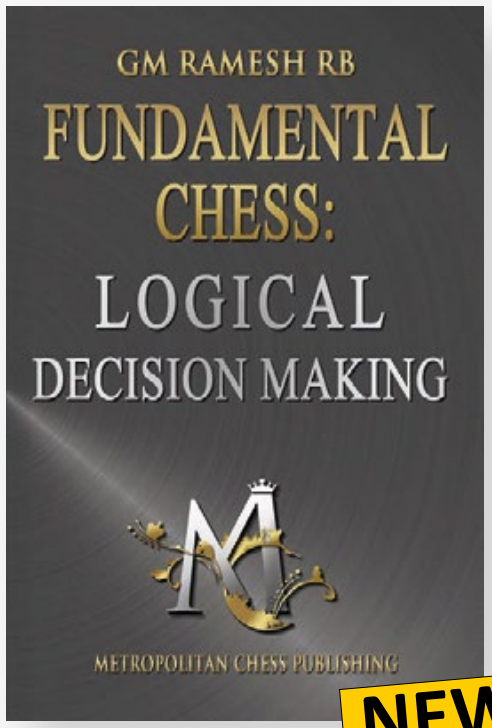


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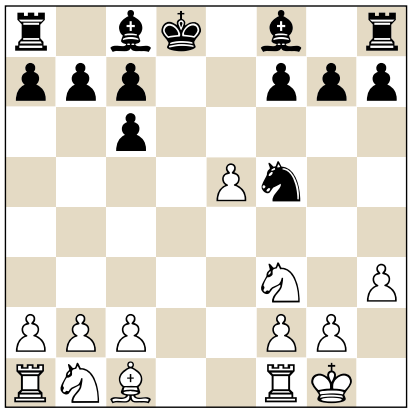
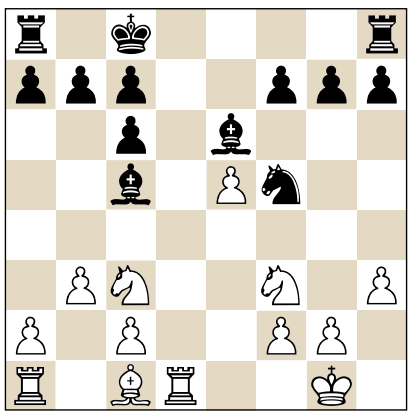
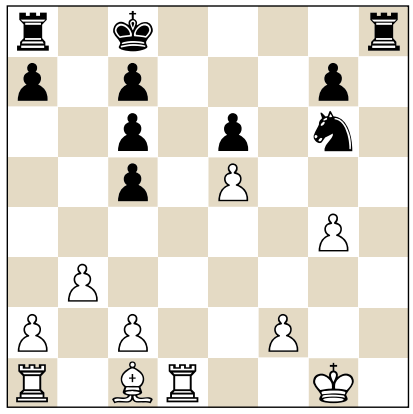


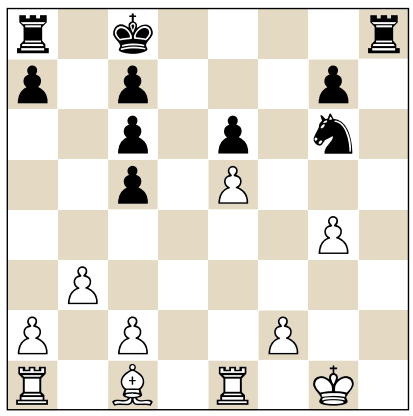
**9...♗c5?!**
9...♗c5 is a bit weird, and I guess he chose it because he wanted to avoid my preparation. The most common move here is 9...♔e8. Another line is 9...♗d7 10.♖d1 ♔c8 11.g4 ♘e7 12.♘g5, when I feel White is better.
**10.♘c3 ♗e6 11.b3!?**
Although the chess engine recommends 11.g4, I still prefer the text, because 11.b3 is more typical in these positions. Future plans include ♗b2, or ♘e4 followed by c4, to control the queenside.
**11...♔c8 12.♖d1**



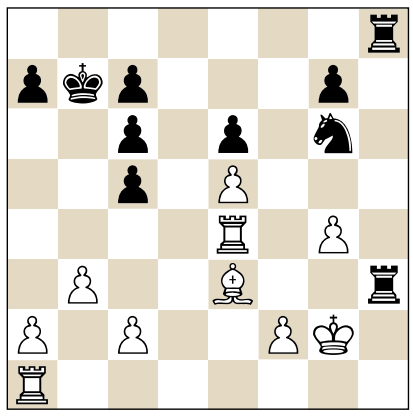
**12...b6?** This is a bad move that weakens Black's queenside pawn structure. I think this move is consistent with Vladimir's style, as he is always prepared to compromise his pawn structure to speed up his attack on the kingside. However, he had missed my defence, as we'll see later in the game.
The correct move here was 12...♖d8 13.♗g5 ♖d7 14.♖xd7 ♔xd7 15.♘a4 ♗b6 16.g4 ♘e7 17.♖d1+ ♔e8 18.♔g2!?, although I still prefer White.
**13.g4 ♘e7 14.♘a4 h5 15.♘xc5 bxc5 16.♘g5 hxg4 17.♘xe6 fxe6 18.hxg4 ♘g6**



**19.♖e1?!** I spent about 20 minutes on this move. I did calculate the best variation, 19.♔g2! ♘xe5 20.♔g3! ♘g6, but I was not sure whether it would secure a win in the endgame after 21.♗b2 e5 22.♖e1. But I overlooked the option of 21.f4! ♔b7 22.♗e3!, when White is simply better.



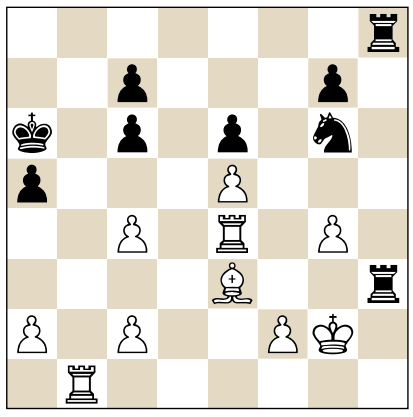
**19...♔b7?** Fedoseev overlooks the plan I will use in the game. I think he should have played 19...♖h3! 20.♗g5! ♔b7 21.♖e4 ♖ah8 22.♖c1!, although White retains pressure and is still better.
**20.♖e4! ♖h3 21.♗e3 ♖ah8 22.♔g2**



**22...c4!** Finally realizing that attacking my kingside won't yield anything, Vladimir sacrifices a pawn to destroy my queenside pawn struc-

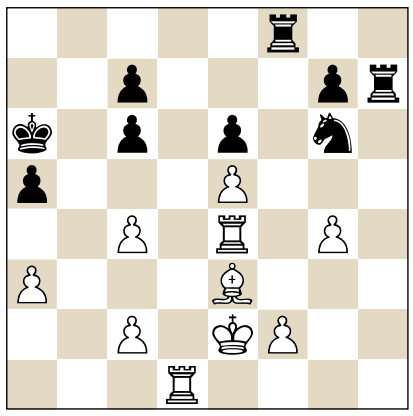
ture. I agree that this was probably his only chance.

**23.bxc4 a5 24.♖b1+ ♔a6 25.♖d1 ♔b7 26.♖b1+?!** A better move was 26.♖d7 ♖3h7 27.♖f7 ♖d8 28.♖d4!! ♘xe5 29.♖e7, and White should be winning. **26...♔a6**



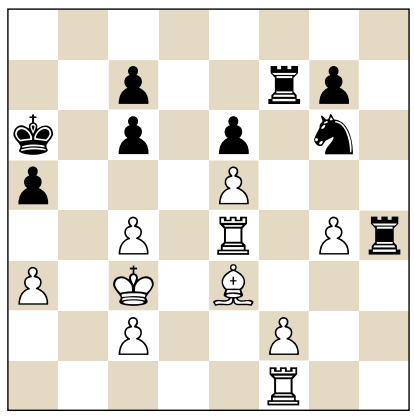
**27.a3!** A strong preventive move. Black may try to exchange rooks and then play ...♖a1 to attack my a-pawn, in which case I can simply play ♗c5 to protect the a3-pawn.

**27...♖h2+ 28.♔f3 ♖f8+ 29.♔e2 ♖hh8 30.♖f1 ♖h4 31.♖d1 ♖h7**



Both players know that White needs to find a plan to break through, while Black can only wait and defend. However, it is still difficult to find such a plan.

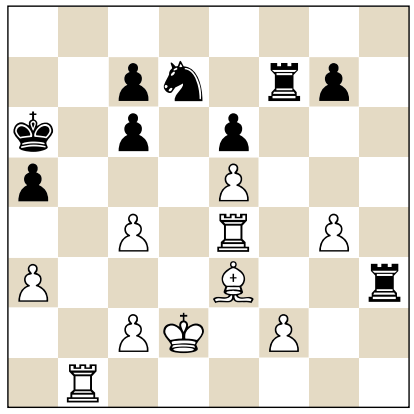
**32.♔d2 ♖hh8 33.♔c3 ♖f7 34.♖f1 ♖h4**



**35.♔d4?** I had finally found the correct way to use all my pieces, but I had missed Black's next move.

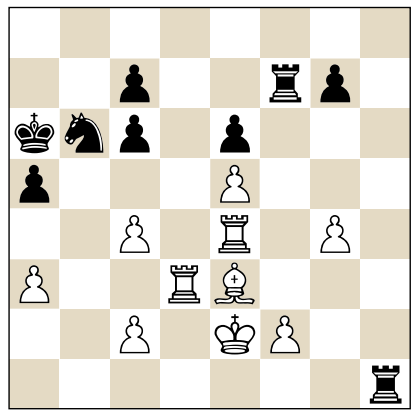
The correct plan was 35.♖b1! ♖h8 36.♔d4 ♘f8 37.♖b8, and White is winning.

**35...♘f8 36.♖b1 ♘d7 37.♔c3 ♖h3 38.♔d2**



**38...♘b6?** While both of us were running low on time, Vladimir committed another error. He should have played 38...c5! 39.♔e2 g6 40.♖b5 ♖h2, although White keeps the better chances.

**39.♔e2 ♖h8 40.♖b3 ♖h1 41.♖d3**



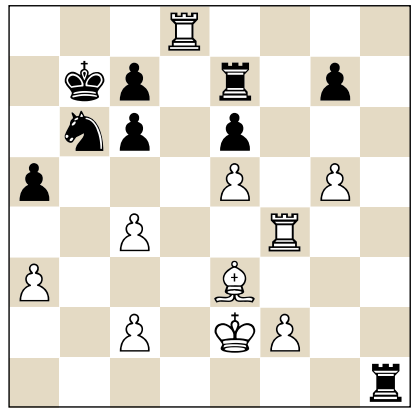
**41...♖g1?** I guess Vladimir was tired after reaching the first time-control on move 40, since he makes a fatal mistake here. He should have gone 41...♖h8 to defend the bottom rank.

After the text-move he cannot stop me from playing ♖d8.

**42.g5!** Now White is winning. I planned to exchange rooks with ♖f4, and then to attack the g7-pawn. Given this plan, my g-pawn should advance, and the further the better.

**42...♖h1 43.♖d8 ♖e7** If 43...♘a4, White goes 44.g6 ♖f5 45.♖f4, and wins.

**44.♖f4 ♔b7**



**45.c5!** A crucial move. I had calculated that I would win the a5-pawn.

**45...♘d7** Or 45...♘d5 46.♖ff8, and wins. **46.♖a4 ♘b8 47.♖xa5 ♖h4 48.♖d3 ♘a6 49.f4 ♔a7 50.♖d4 ♖h2+ 51.♗f2 g6 52.♖da4 ♖eh7 53.♖xa6+ ♔b7 54.♖a7+**

Vladimir resigned after I avoided his last trap (54.♖a8?? ♖xf2+ 55.♔xf2 ♖h2+ and stalemate!).

■ ■ ■

**Khanty-Mansiysk 2017**

| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Mp | Bp |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | China | * | 2½ | 2½ | 2½ | 2 | 2½ | 3½ | 2 | 3½ | 3½ | 16 | 24½ |
| 2 | Russia | 1½ | * | 3 | 2½ | 2 | 2½ | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3½ | 15 | 25 |
| 3 | Poland | 1½ | 1 | * | 2½ | 1½ | 3 | 3 | 2½ | 2½ | 3 | 12 | 20½ |
| 4 | India | 1½ | 1½ | 1½ | * | 2 | 2½ | 2½ | 3½ | 3 | 2½ | 11 | 20½ |
| 5 | Turkey | 2 | 2 | 2½ | 2 | * | 2 | 1½ | 1 | 2½ | 3 | 10 | 18½ |
| 6 | Ukraine | 1½ | 1½ | 1 | 1½ | 2 | * | 2 | 2½ | 3 | 2½ | 8 | 17½ |
| 7 | Belarus | ½ | 1 | 1 | 1½ | 2½ | 2 | * | 2 | 3½ | 3½ | 8 | 17½ |
| 8 | United States | 2 | 0 | 1½ | ½ | 3 | 1½ | 2 | * | 2½ | 3 | 8 | 16 |
| 9 | Norway | ½ | 1 | 1½ | 1 | 1½ | 1 | ½ | 1½ | * | 2½ | 2 | 11 |
| 10 | Egypt | ½ | ½ | 1 | 1½ | 1 | 1½ | ½ | 1 | 1½ | * | 0 | 9 |

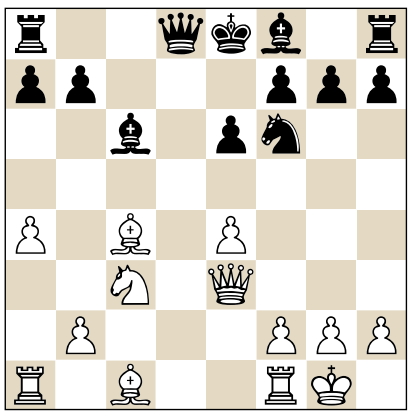
And in the final round, against Poland, Li Chao was the big man on the Chinese team again. On Boards 2 and 4, Yu Yangyi and Li Chao managed to get their combined prep on the board, but it was Li Chao who brought home the point against Bartel, which helped China to clinch the title.

NOTES BY
**Adhiban Baskaran**

**Li Chao**
**Mateusz Bartel**
Khanty-Mansiysk 2017 (9)
Slav Defence

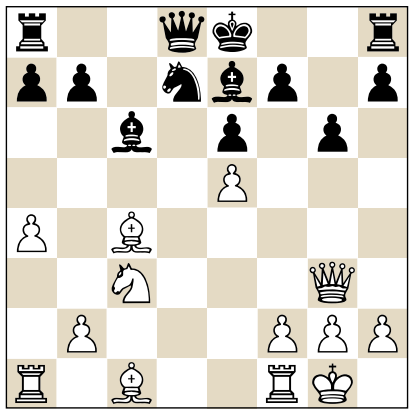
**1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 e6 6.e3 c5 7.♗xc4 ♘c6 8.0-0 cxd4 9.♘xd4 ♗d7 10.e4 ♘xd4 11.♕xd4 ♗c6**
On both Board 2 and Board 4, the players were blitzing the same moves.

**12.♕e3!?**

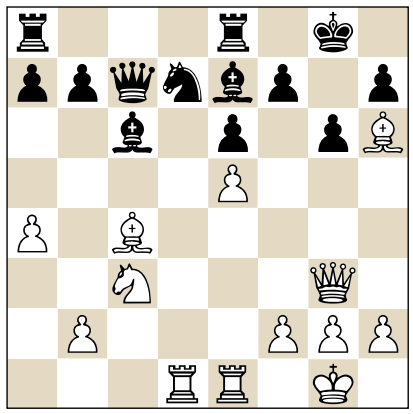


This position was the result of the combined prep of the Chinese team.

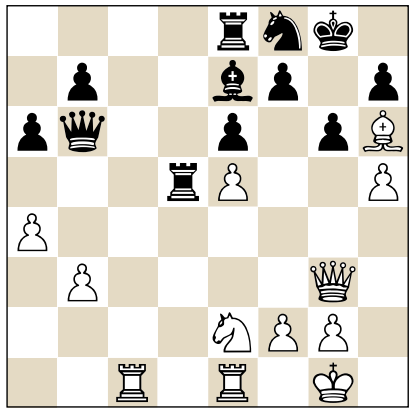
**12...♗e7**
Black had to play 12...♗d6!, when he is very close to 0.00, I wonder what the Chinese were intending to do here... Any takers for the black side?
**13.e5 ♘d7 14.♕g3 g6**



**15.♖e1!?** Li Chao's move seems to make sense, since the d-file will be occupied by the a1-rook.
In his game against Duda on Board 2, Yu Yangyi preferred 15.♖d1, but wasn't able to cause Black any real problems after 15...a6! 16.♗h6 ♕a5 17.♗f1 ♗f8! 18.♗xf8 ♔xf8 19.f4 ♕b6+, and Black drew comfortably.
But the strongest move was the most natural 15.♗h6, preventing ...0-0 options: 15...a6 16.♗d3! (the bishop wasn't doing much on c4) 16...♘c5 17.♗c2, with a superior position for White.
**15...0-0** If 15...a6, then 16.♗h6 ♗f8 17.♗xf8 ♔xf8 18.♖ad1 ♔g7 19.♘e2!, and the knight will take up a commanding position on f4, forcing Black to be very careful, because there will be many sacrifices in the air once it arrives there.
**16.♗h6 ♖e8 17.♖ad1 ♕c7**

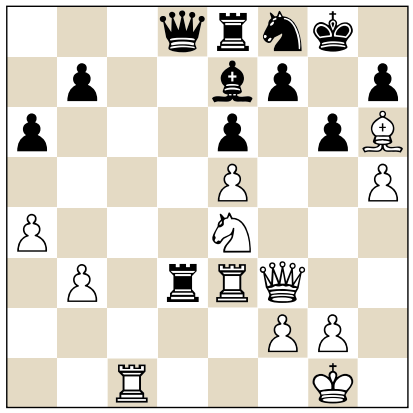


The first step in the wrong direction. As in Duda's game, it is very useful to prevent any ♗b5/♘b5 options with 17...a6!?, followed by ...♕a5 or ...♕b6, and Black is very solid and has nothing to worry about.
**18.h4!** Always a nice move to loosen up the kingside.
**18...♖ad8 19.♖c1 ♕b6 20.h5 ♘f8 21.b3**
Following Dvoretsky's golden principle 'Do not hurry!'.
**21...a6 22.♘e2** Stronger was 22.♘e4, with a clear advantage.
**22...♗d5 23.♗xd5 ♖xd5**

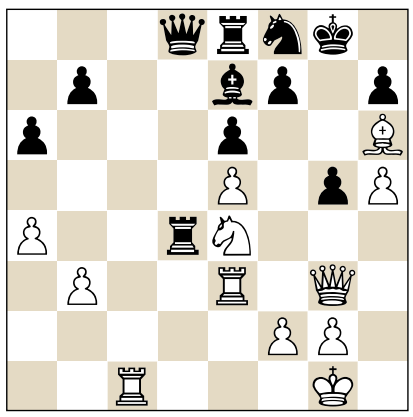


**24.♘c3!**
Surprise! Li Chao realizes that e4 is the key square, juicier than f4.

**24...♖d7 25.♘e4 ♕d8 26.♕f3 ♖d3 27.♖e3**



**27...♖d4** 27...♖xe3 28.fxe3! ♘d7 29.♕f4, followed by ♖f1 and a winning attack.
**28.♕f4** Preparing the nasty ♖f3.
**28...g5** Black takes drastic measures, but now the kingside has been permanently weakened.
**29.♕g3**



After this it was just a matter of time before Black threw in the towel.
**29...♖d1+ 30.♖e1 ♖d3 31.f3 f6 32.exf6 ♗xf6 33.♗xg5 ♗xg5 34.♘xg5 ♕d4+ 35.♔h2 ♕g7 36.♖c7 ♖d7 37.♖xd7 ♘xd7 38.♖xe6** Black resigned.

Due to the conflicting dates with the Grand Chess Tour, Russia fielded their 'B' team, with Nepomniachtchi the only remaining member of last year's Olympiad team. Their 'second choice' consisted of Svidler, Nepo, Vitiugov, Matlakov and Fedoseev, with a measly rating average of 2729! They scored heavily on Boards 2 to 4, which won them silver. Nepo was their major striker, scoring 6/8 with a stunning 2820 TPR.

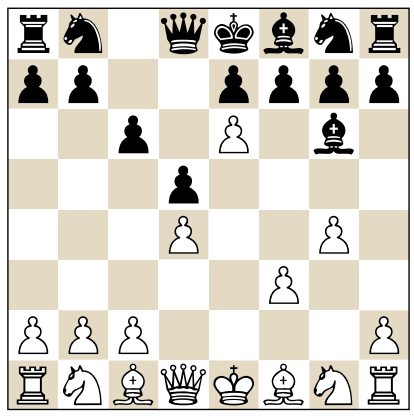
ETERI KUBLASHVILI

**Ian Nepomniachtchi was Russia's major striker, scoring 6/8 with a stunning 2820 tournament performance rating.**

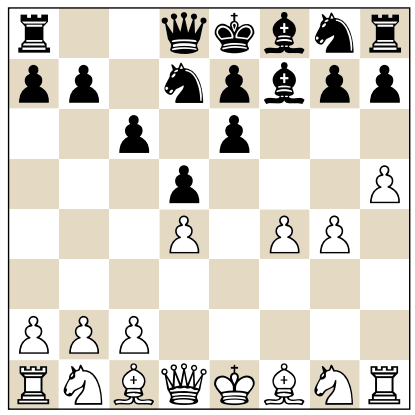
The following game was played in the final round, when Russia dealt a strong blow by whitewashing USA 4-0 (improving on India's win of 3½-½ against the same team! Just putting it out there ☺).

**Ian Nepomniachtchi**
**Samuel Shankland**
Khanty-Mansiysk 2017 (9.1)
Caro-Kann

**1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 ♗f5 4.g4!?**
Not one to shy away from crazy complications, Nepomniachtchi turns up the heat on move 4!
**4...♗e4** 4...♗d7!? is a safe alternative, not allowing any e6 nonsense, when Black will revert to French type structures with ...e6 and aim to exploit White's overstretched kingside pawn structure.
**5.f3 ♗g6 6.e6!?**

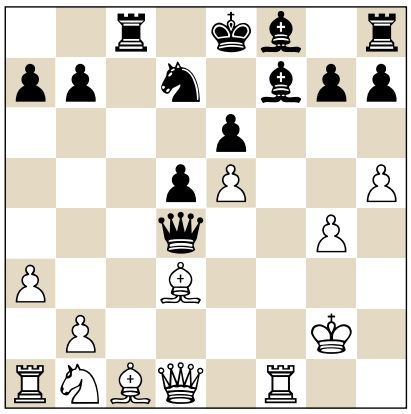


An interesting move, which has been underestimated so far – and for good reason ☺.
**6...fxe6 7.h4 ♘d7** Maybe 7...e5 was a decent option: 8.dxe5 e6, although after 9.h5 ♗f7 10.f4 White's control of the kingside looks strong.
**8.h5 ♗f7 9.f4**

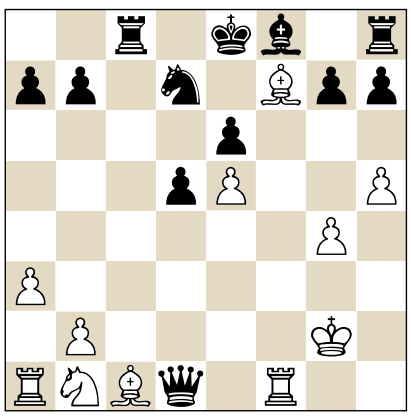


**9...e5** Desperation! But what else? 9...♘h6!? is the comp's way of playing, and it is convinced that Black is doing great.
**10.fxe5 e6 11.♘f3 c5 12.c3 ♘e7 13.♗d3 ♘c6 14.0-0**
White has a nice initiative on the kingside, but the comp firmly believes that the position's evaluation is 0.00.
**14...♕b6 15.♔g2 ♖c8**
15...♗e7 is totally fine for Black.
**16.a3 cxd4 17.cxd4 ♘xd4!?**
At least Black is not going down without a fight!

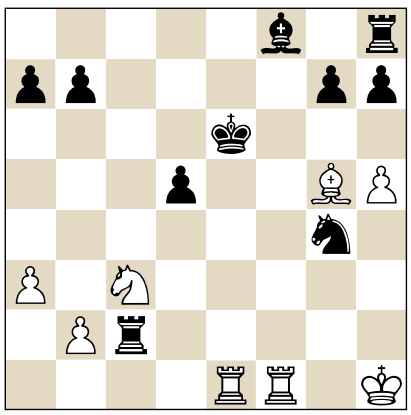
17...♗e7 18.♘c3 leads to a depressing position for Black.
**18.♘xd4 ♕xd4**



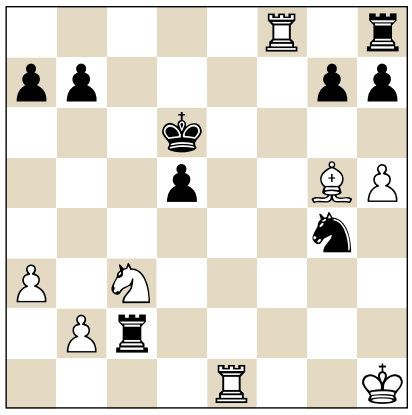
**19.♗g6!** Simple and neat.
19.♖xf7 ♖xc1! was Shankland's intention: 20.♖xf8+ ♔xf8, winning.
**19...♕xd1 20.♗xf7+**



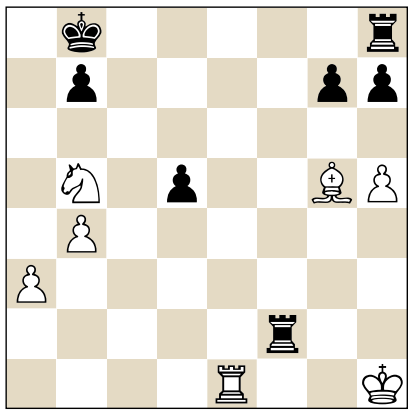
When I saw this position, I assumed that White had won a convincing game. But this was far from the truth, because Black had many chances to come back into the game.
**20...♔d8** For instance, 20...♔e7 21.♗g5+ ♘f6 22.♖xd1 ♔xf7 offered Black sufficient compensation for the piece. **21.♖xd1 ♔e7 22.♖f1 ♖c2+ 23.♔h1 ♘xe5 24.♗g5+ ♔d7 25.♘c3 ♘xg4 26.♗xe6+!? ♔xe6 27.♖ae1+**



**27...♔d6** Also possible was 27...♘e5 28.♗f4 ♗d6 29.♘b5 ♖c4 30.♘xd6 ♖xf4! 31.♖xf4 ♔xd6 32.h6 g6! 33.♖f6+ ♔e7 34.♖f2 ♔d6 35.♖fe2 ♖e8, with good chances to save the game.
**28.♖xf8**



**28...♘f2+?!** 28...♖xf8 29.♗e7+ ♔c6 30.♗xf8 ♘f2+ 31.♔g1 ♘h3+ 32.♔h1 ♘f2+ 33.♔h2 d4, and the d-pawn will create enough trouble to guarantee a draw. **29.♖xf2 ♖xf2 30.♘b5+ ♔c6 31.♘xa7+ ♔c7 32.♘b5+ ♔b8 33.b4**



And Nepo confidently converted after 69 moves.

The fight for the bronze medals turned into a race between Poland and India, in which our rivals prevailed thanks to solid showings by Wojtaszek, Duda and Gajewski. I reluctantly asked Piorun (another member of the Polish team), 'Have you guys ever won a medal in the World Teams?', not wanting to offend them. To which he replied, 'No, this is our first medal after the second World War!' They were so well placed after Round 8 that even a loss in the final round didn't ruin their chances of a medal.

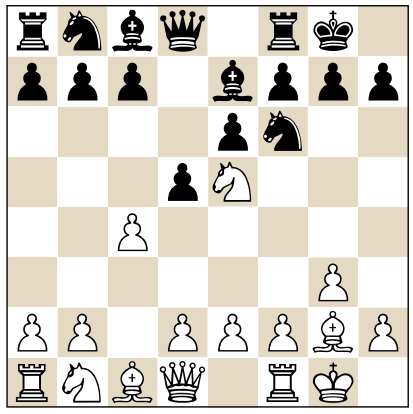
The match India-Poland was on the menu in Round 2. The following game gave us hope.

**Vidit Gujrathi**
**Radoslaw Wojtaszek**
Khanty-Mansiysk 2017 (1.1)
English Opening

**1.♘f3 d5 2.g3** When this happened, I thought to myself, 'Ah great... another boring fianchetto from Vidit!' Little did I know that it was going to be an epic game.
**2...♘f6 3.♗g2 e6 4.0-0 ♗e7 5.c4 0-0 6.♘e5!?**
A stunning idea from Vidit, which had already been played by Anish

## 'I almost fell out of my chair laughing when I saw this.'

Giri in a blitz game. I almost fell out of my chair laughing when I saw this.



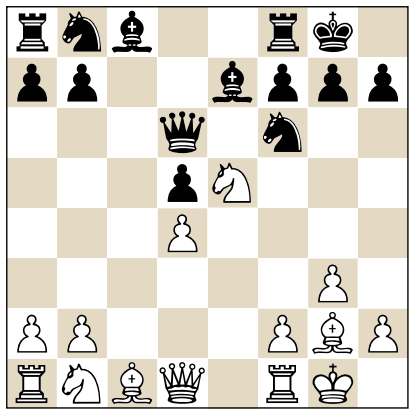
**6...c5** The model game went 6...♘bd7 7.d4 c6 8.♘c3 ♘xe5 9.dxe5 ♘d7 10.cxd5 exd5 11.f4 ♖e8 12.♗e3 ♗c5 13.♗xc5 ♘xc5 14.♕d2 f6 15.exf6 ♕xf6 16.b4 ♘e4 17.♘xe4 dxe4 18.♕e3 a5 19.b5 cxb5 20.♕b3+ ♔h8 21.♕xb5 ♕d4+ 22.♔h1 ♗g4 23.♖ae1 ♕d2 24.h3 ♗e6 25.a3 ♕e3 26.♔h2 b6 27.f5 ♗f7 28.f6 g6 29.♖c1 ♔g8 30.♖c7 ♖f8 31.♖e7 ♕xa3 32.♕g5 1-0; Giri-So, chess.com 2017.
**7.cxd5 exd5** 7...♘xd5 8.♘c3 looks pleasant for White. **8.e3** 8.d4 cxd4 9.♕xd4 (9.♘d2 ♘c6 is also fine for Black) 9...♘c6 10.♘xc6 bxc6 doesn't

**Vidit Gujrathi: 'I just enjoyed playing this game and wasn't concerned about the conversion!'**

seem so bad for Black, since he can either go for ...c5 or ...♕b6.

**8...♕d6?!** The queen ends up wasting a lot of time running around aimlessly. The natural 8...♘c6 was to be preferred: 9.♘xc6 bxc6, when White can continue 10.b3!?, followed by pressure on the c5-pawn.

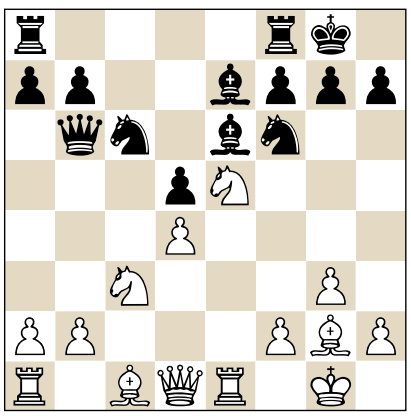
**9.d4 cxd4 10.exd4**



**10...♗e6** 10...♘e4!? was an interesting attempt to hinder White's development: 11.♗f4 ♕a6 12.♘c3! ♘xc3 13.bxc3 ♗e6 14.♕b3 ♘c6 15.♖fb1, and White wins a pawn.

**11.♘c3 ♕b6** Better was 11...♘c6 12.♗f4, when 12...♕b4! would give Black reasonable chances to equalize.

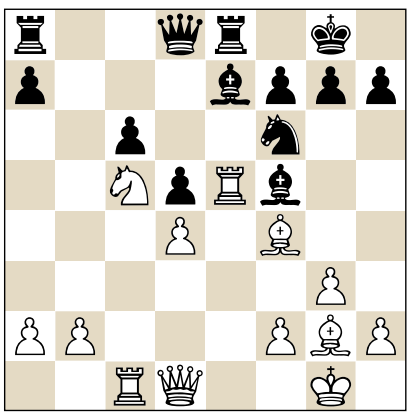
**12.♖e1 ♘c6** 12...♘a6!? might look silly, but at least the knight will go to c7 and protect d5.



**13.♘a4!** I think Wojtaszek had just missed this move.

**13...♕d8 14.♘xc6 bxc6 15.♗f4** Almost effortlessly White has achieved an advantage.

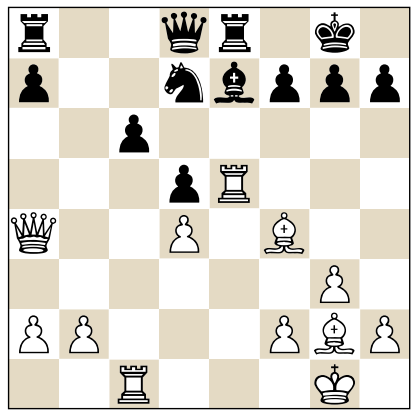
**15...♖e8 16.♖c1 ♗d7 17.♘c5 ♗f5 18.♖e5** As Vidit mentioned after the game, 'I just enjoyed playing this game and wasn't concerned about the conversion!'



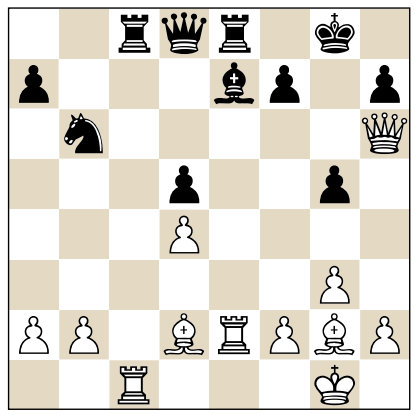
**18...♗c8?!** This is the real culprit. Good or bad, it would have been better to put the bishop on g6, was my initial thought: 18...♗g6; but after 19.♕a4 the queenside pawns come under pressure and there is nothing to protect them!

Still it was possible to minimize the damage with 18...♗g4!? 19.♕a4 ♘d7! 20.♖ee1 ♘xc5 21.dxc5 ♕d7 22.b4, with a slight edge due to a better pawn structure.

**19.♕a4** Now it is just very difficult for Black. **19...♗d7 20.♘xd7 ♘xd7**



**21.♖e2!** If there ever was a need to double the rooks on one of the open files... **21...g5 22.♗d2 ♘b6 23.♕xc6 ♖c8 24.♕h6**



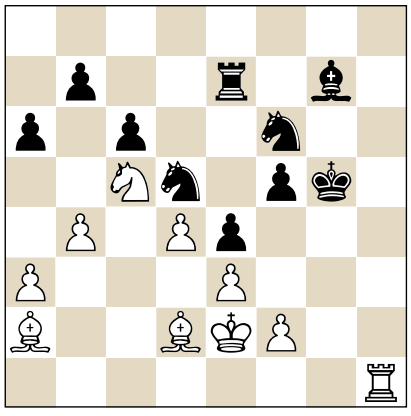
No, no, Vidit is not looking to mate the black king. He just wants to grab the g5-pawn ☺. He tends to be quite greedy.

**24...♖xc1+ 25.♗xc1 f6 26.♗h3 ♗f8 27.♖xe8** Black resigned.

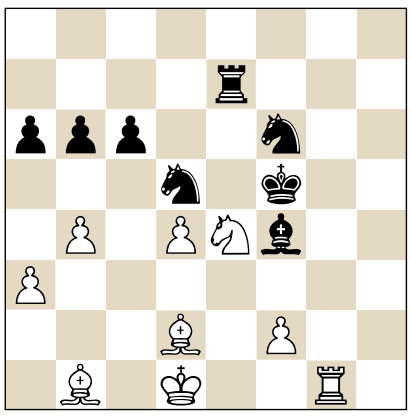
A convincing victory by my teammate, but unfortunately, owing to losses on Boards 2 and 3, we ended up losing this match, which cost us dearly in the end.

This is what happened in my game on Board 2.

**Jan-Krzysztof Duda**
**Adhiban Baskaran**
Khanty-Mansiysk 2017 (1)



My position wasn't exactly attractive, but what I did just hastened my defeat.
**46...f4 47.♖g1+ ♔f5 48.exf4 ♗h6 49.♗b1 b6** I had pinned my hopes on this move, but it runs into a chilly reply. But after 49...♘xf4+ 50.♔f1! b6 51.♘xe4 ♘xe4 52.f3 White is also winning.
**50.♘xe4! ♗xf4**
50...♖xe4+ was my main idea: 51.♔d1!, followed by f3, and there is nothing I can do about anything.
**51.♔d1!**



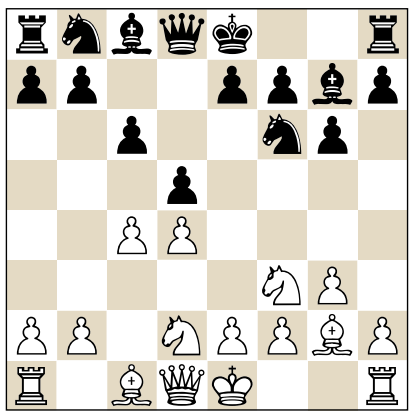
**51...♗xd2** Running into a mating pattern similar to my game against Harikrishna from this year's Tata Steel Masters. 51...♘xe4 was urgently called for, although 52.f3 ♗xd2 53.fxe4+ ♔f4 54.exd5 ♗c3 55.♖f1+ ♔g3 56.dxc6 ♗xd4 57.♗f5 gives White a winning endgame.
**52.♘g5+! ♘e4** Since 52...♔f4 53.♘h3+ ♔f3 54.♖g3 is mate.
**53.♗xe4+ ♖xe4 54.♘xe4 ♔xe4 55.♔xd2** And White won soon after.

**Adhiban Baskaran, playing in the spirit of McDonnell-Labourdonnais. 'Indeed, we really are standing on the shoulders of giants!'**

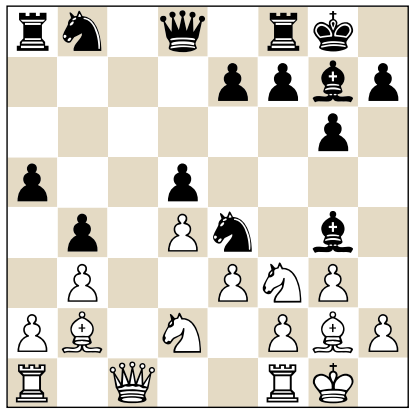
The above first-round loss didn't dishearten Radek Wojtaszek in the least, and he went on to lead his team to third place. Here's how he bounced back immediately in Round 2.

**Radoslaw Wojtaszek**
**Samuel Shankland**
Khanty-Mansiysk 2017 (2)
Neo-Grünfeld Defence

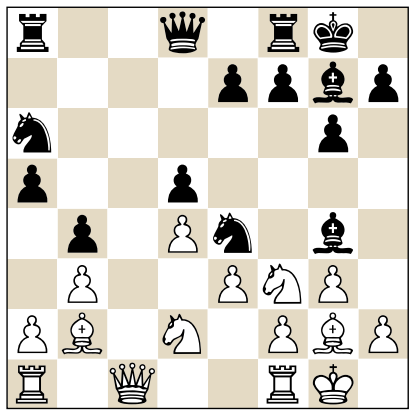
**1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.g3 c6 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.♗g2 d5 6.♘bd2**



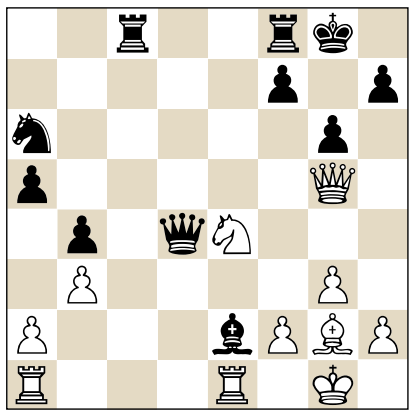
Another deviation from the popular b3 line.
**6...0-0 7.0-0 a5 8.b3 ♘e4** 8...a4 is another plan, in which 9.♗b2 should be preferred (since White has very bad statistics after 9.♗a3). **9.e3 ♗g4** 9...♗f5!? would be the natural continuation for equality. **10.♗a3 b5 11.cxd5 cxd5 12.♕c1!** Now it is clear that the bishop is badly placed on g4. **12...b4 13.♗b2**



**13...♘a6?!** Missing White's simple retort. 13...♗f5! was still sufficient to hold the balance: 14.♘h4 ♘d7 15.♘xf5 gxf5 16.♘xe4 dxe4 17.f3 ♖c8 18.♕d2 exf3 19.♗xf3 e6, and Black is sufficiently solid.



**14.♘xe4 dxe4 15.♘g5** I wonder what Shankland had missed, because White is just clearly better after this.
**15...e5 16.♘xe4 exd4 17.♗xd4 ♗xd4 18.exd4 ♕xd4 19.♕g5**
Dark clouds are gathering around the black king ☺.
**19...♗e2 20.♖fe1 ♖ac8**



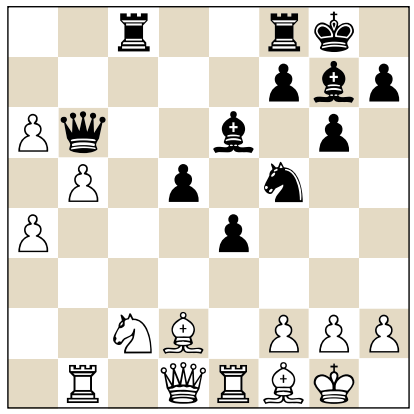
**21.♖ac1**
The simplest win was 21.♕f6 ♕xf6 22.♘xf6+ ♔g7 23.♖xe2 ♔xf6 24.♗b7, winning an exchange.
**21...♕b2 22.♖xc8 ♖xc8 23.♘d6 ♖f8 24.♕e7 ♗h5 25.♗d5**
Black resigned.
This game is a good example of what can happen if you are not careful, even in a relatively harmless line.

Boris Gelfand once said: 'What is the point of playing in the same team if you don't speak with each other after the round?' Indeed, in team events, one of the key element is the team spirit (although you might argue that for a beastly line-up like the one USA had for the Baku Olympiad, things like this don't matter ☺), and when one of your friends goes down, you need to take responsibility and become the hero your country deserves!

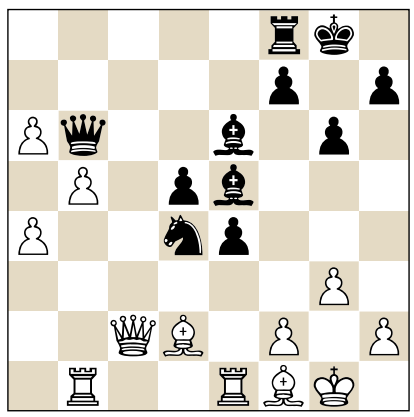
On paper, our team is never the strongest one, but thanks to these other elements we feel we have the potential to take out any team! We were close to the medals, but lacked the finishing blow and hence finished in 4th place. But as always we will learn from this and come back stronger, especially me!

Lastly I will present a game which was one of my favourites, from the match Egypt-India (1½-2½), because I was able to play in the spirit of the McDonnell-Labourdonnais match of 1834. Indeed, we really are standing on the shoulders of giants!

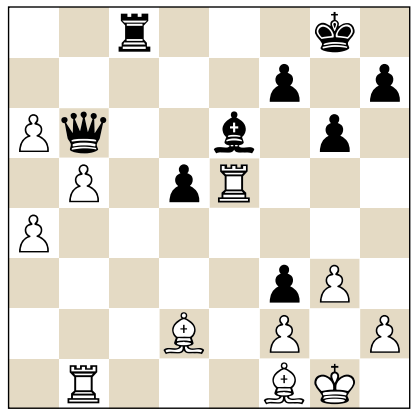
**Adhiban Baskaran**
**Adham Fawzy**
Khanty-Mansiysk 2017 (5)



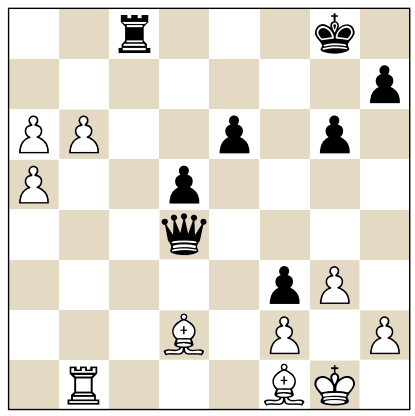
**22...♗e5!?**
The best practical chance.
22...♖xc2 23.♕xc2 ♖c8 24.♕d1 ♕xf2+ 25.♔xf2 ♗d4+ 26.♔e2? (26.♗e3 is the move) 26...♘g3+ 27.hxg3 ♗g4 was a funny mate that my opponent had seen.
**23.g3! ♖xc2**
I had been expecting this and had a nasty surprise ready.
**24.♕xc2 ♘d4**



**25.♕d1!**
After 25.♗e3 ♘f3+ 26.♔h1 d4 Black manages to get decent counterplay.
**25...♘f3+ 26.♕xf3 exf3 27.♖xe5**
Now the mighty pawns will have their say in the end!
**27...♖c8**

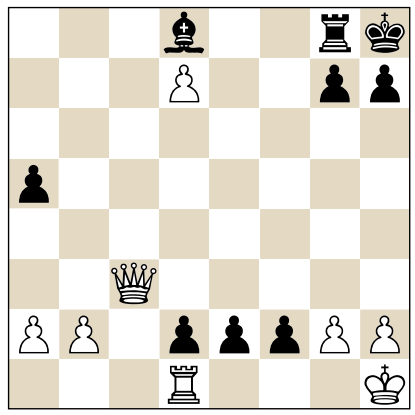


**28.♖xe6!** Removing one obstacle after another until nothing can stop the pawns anymore...
28.a5 ♕d4 29.♖xe6 ♕xd2 should also win, but gives Black unnecessary hopes.
**28...fxe6 29.a5 ♕d4**
29...♕b8 30.b6 ♖f8 31.a7 ♕b7, and if only the a5-pawn hadn't been there, there might have been hope for Black.
**30.b6!**



The unstoppable pawns! Black resigned. ■

PS: For those who do not know, this is the game I was referring to:



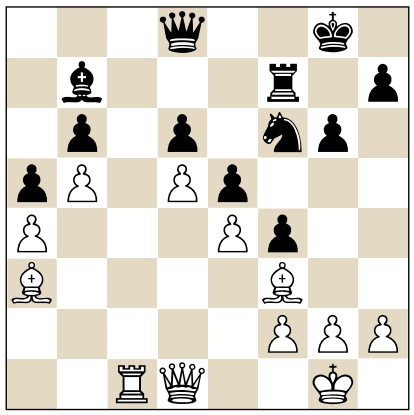
**McDonnell-Labourdonnais**
London 1834, 4th match, Game 16
position after 37...e2

ARTHUR VAN DE OUDEWEETERING

# Silently sacking the exchange

When you do not give up your rook by capturing a piece but offer the exchange on a silver platter.

Not too long ago, a Bundesliga round saw two similar exchange sacs: a rook was put on a seemingly inaccessible square, plugging the only open file on the board.



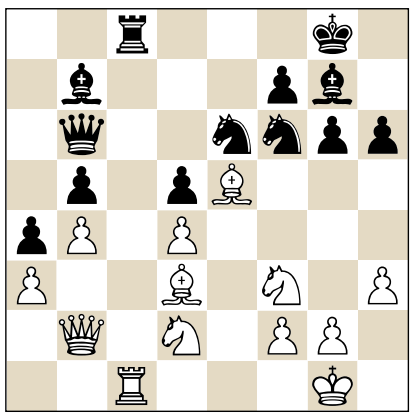
**Blübaum-Belezky**
Germany Bundesliga 2016
position after 23...g6

**24.♖c6 ♘e8** Black refuses the sacrifice and tries to hold on by keeping the position closed. After 24...♗xc6 25.dxc6 ♘e8 26.♗e2 ♔g7 27.♗c4 the strong passer on c6 and the passive black rook provide ample compensation.

**25.♗g4 ♔f8 26.f3 ♔e7?**

White's last move must have taken away Black's sense of danger, since he misses an elegant tactical blow here. 26...♗xc6 was as good as forced now, when 27.dxc6 again gives White dominant play, but no immediate breakthrough.

**27.♕a1 ♔f6 28.♕xe5+!** Oops. 1-0.

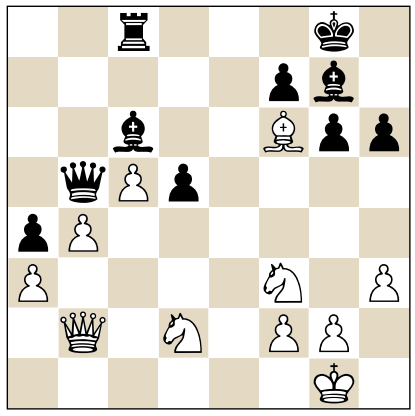


**Vallejo-Janssen**
Germany Bundesliga 2016
position after 27...♖c8

**28.♖c5!?** Vallejo avoids further simplifications along the c-file, which is not an uncommon incentive for this sort of exchange sac.

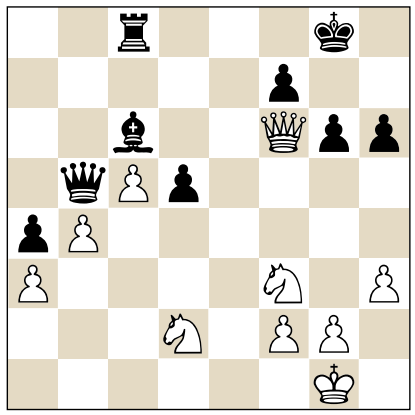
**28...♗c6** Here, too, Black refuses to take, and indeed, after 28...♘xc5 29.dxc5 ♕a6?! 30.♘d4 White's advantage is overwhelming. By capturing away from the centre White has not only vacated a splendid square for his knight, but also set up a strong battery along the a1-h8 diagonal. But the text-move allows a tactical strike, just as 28...♗a6 would have:

**29.♗xb5 ♘xc5 30.dxc5 ♕xb5 31.♗xf6**



**31...♗xf6?** Now the white pieces easily drop in on Black's king. He should have tried 31...♗f8 32.♘d4 (or 32.♕c1 to regroup on the diagonal with a subsequent ♗b2 and ♕c3) 32...♕d3 33.♘2f3, and apart from the extra pawn, White's positional compensation is evident.

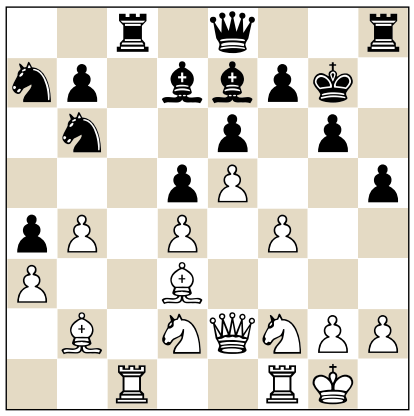
**32.♕xf6**



**32...♕e2** Black would love to activate his rook at some point, but here 32...♖e8 is simply impossible due to 33.♘e5. **33.♘e5 ♗e8 34.♘df3 d4?** 34...♕b2. **35.♘g4 d3 36.♘xh6+ ♔h7 37.♘g4 ♔g8 38.♘g5 ♔f8 39.♘h6** 1-0.

As Petrosian noted in an article on positional exchange sacrifices: 'Gradually I have come to the conclusion that the hardest barrier for a player deciding on such a sac is a psychological one.' And indeed, we start learning chess by acquainting ourselves with the material value of the pieces. However, history has provided us with plenty of successful examples, and by studying and remembering the pattern

we will more easily notice the possibility. For example, Blübaum's ♖c6 is not uncommon in Classical King's Indian fights, while Vallejo's ♖c5 certainly bears resemblance to this one:

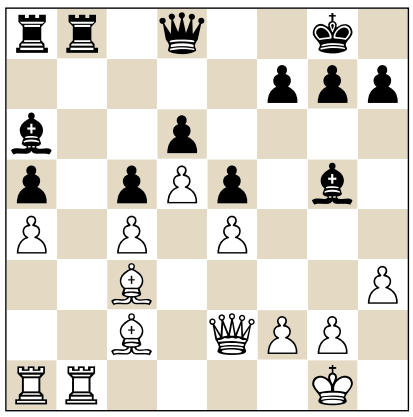


**Koblentz-Ravinsky**
Leningrad 1949
position after 19...♕e8

**20.♖c5!?** Again no simplification along the c-file.
**20...♗xc5 21.dxc5! ♘a8 22.♘f3** Again on its way to the fine central square that has just been vacated.
**22...♗b5 23.♘d4 ♗xd3 24.♘xd3 b6?** Now White's next break – involving the long diagonal! – comes full force.
**25.f5 bxc5** 25...gxf5 26.♘xf5+ exf5 27.e6+, and wins.
**26.♘xc5 ♖xc5 27.f6+** The machine points out 27.fxe6 ♖c7 28.♖f6 as even stronger, but after **27...♔h7 28.bxc5** Tal's future long-time trainer also proceeded to win. **28...♘c7 29.♖f4 ♕f8 30.♕c2 ♕b8 31.♖h4 ♔g8 32.♖h3 ♘a6 33.♘xe6 ♕c8 34.♘f4 ♕xc5+ 35.♕xc5 ♘xc5 36.♗d4 g5 37.♘xd5 g4 38.♘e7+ ♔f8 39.♖c3** 1-0.

Koblentz had no pawn for the exchange, but Black's rooks were utterly passive. This is a very relevant factor (how should you make use of an extra exchange when your rook is passive?), which may remind you of the classical example of this silent exchange sac: Liublinsky-Botvinnik, Moscow 1943. A game that, according to John Watson (in *Secrets of Modern Chess Strategy*), was a forerunner of many other exchange sacrifices. He adds that it took decades for many Western players to appreciate the compensation of these sacs which were played by their Russian colleagues. These days you could say that these exchange sacrifices are widely known and appreciated. The next example strikingly resembles Botvinnik's classic.

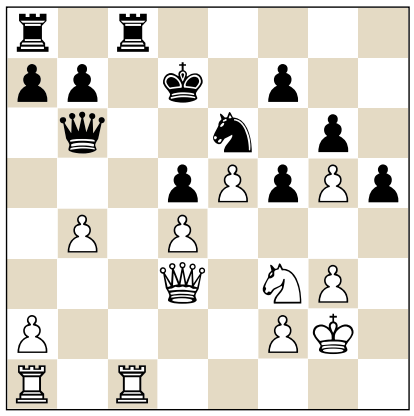
**'It took decades for many Western players to appreciate the compensation of these sacs, which were played by their Russian colleagues.'**



**Loncar-Romanishin**
Pula 1994
position after 28.♗c3

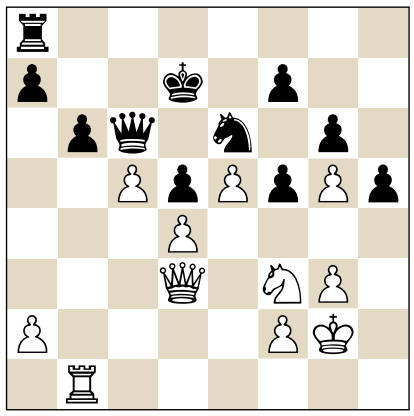
**28...♖b4** I guess you saw this one coming. Remember the decisive Game 11 in Carlsen-Anand, Sochi 2014? See New In Chess 2014/6. Same idea and same move in an otherwise different position.
**29.♗xb4 cxb4! 30.♗b3 g6 31.♖b2 ♖c8 32.♖c2 ♖c5 33.♖f1 ♗c8 34.♕d3 f5 35.♖e2 f4**
A passed pawn, some spatial advantage and two bishops for Black, while White's rooks don't have any open file – all similar to the game from 1943! Loncar underwent the same fate as Liublinsky: he was gradually outplayed by his stronger opponent. (0-1, 70)

You may have noticed that Steinitz's adage 'A sacrifice is best refuted by accepting it' does not always apply to these silent exchange sacs that block the open file. In fact, in the above game White might have considered parrying Black's threat with 29.♗d3. In the next example Black managed to keep a cool head.



**Sandipan-Ilyushin**
Cappelle-la-Grande 2003
position after 22...♘e6

**23.♖c5** Here the silent sac practically forces Black to capture, since the pawn on d5 is hanging.
**23...♖xc5!** Black prefers keeping his strong knight on e6 to gaining material and being stuck with passive rooks. Sounds logical, but to hit upon the idea you have to cross a psychological barrier. Cold-blooded calculation may help, though. After 23...♘xc5 24.dxc5 – by now the natural recapture – the knight comes to d4, although Black may hold after the inventive 24...♕e6 25.♖e1 d4! 26.♘xd4 ♕d5+.
**24.bxc5 ♕c6 25.♖b1 b6**



And Black had no problems whatsoever. He soon took over the initiative and eventually won. (0-1, 66)

Remember the typical features of this pattern and always try to consider the relative value of the pieces! ■

Sadler on Books

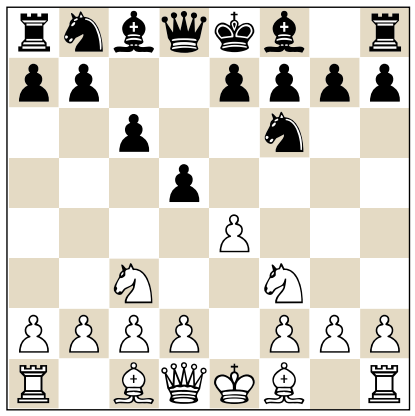
# ‘What makes a really good book?’

**MATTHEW SADLER** looks at the latest crop of books and DVDs, from a ‘fashionable’ opening to other ways to get fresh input in your games.

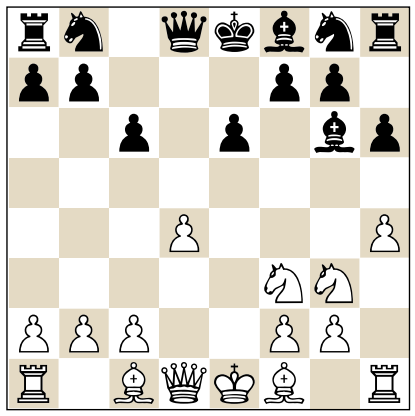
With so many opening books on the market, catching a potential reader’s attention is becoming an increasingly desperate business. Some recent publications have caught my eye with word combinations in the title that I would only expect to hear spoken with a sarcastic tone of voice. We’ve had *The Agile London System*, *The Venomous Italian Game*, *Steamrolling the Sicilian* (with the 5.f3 system, of all things!) and now we have the *Fashionable Caro-Kann*. I don’t know about you, but my mental image of the Caro-Kann is more of old men at the chess club smoking pipes than of fast cars, loose women and designer clothes!

That said, it’s been a little while since a high-class grandmaster has given his take on this opening – Bologan’s 2014 ChessBase DVD was the most recent, not counting Negi’s attempt to demolish the Caro-Kann from the White side in his fantastic *1.e4 vs the French, Caro-Kann and Philidor* – so this DVD by Vidit Gujrathi fills a gap in the market.

Vidit is a strong Indian GM currently rated 2693 and a successful long-time practitioner of the opening. Between 2010 and 2017, Megabase shows 49 games of his, scoring +16, =23, -10 against an average of 2569 for a 2589 rating performance, so you can be sure he knows what he’s doing! Vidit recommends a variety of lines, some of which he plays himself, for example 3...♘f6 against the Two Knights Variation – 1.e4 c6 2.♘c3 d5 3.♘f3 ♘f6



with which he defeated Radjabov at the Doha rapid in 2016, or 1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 ♗f5 4.♘f3 e6 5.♗e2 c5 with which he defeated MVL at the same event. And some of which are not in his repertory, for example 7...e6 against the Classical Main Line: 1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4 4.♘xe4 ♗f5 5.♘g3 ♗g6 6.h4 h6 7.♘f3 e6.



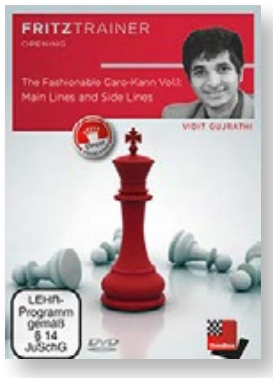
Instead of 7...♘d7 which he has played seven times himself (though all those games were played before 2013). Most of the lines he recommends are extremely topical. For example, he dedicates two chapters to the extremely sharp 1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4 4.♘xe4 ♗f5 5.♘g3 ♗g6 6.h4 h6 7.♘f3 e6 8.♘e5 ♗h7 9.♗d3 ♗xd3 10.♕xd3 ♘d7 11.f4 ♗e7 12.♗d2 ♘xe5 13.fxe5 ♗xh4 14.0-0-0 ♗xg3 15.♕xg3 ♘e7 16.♕xg7 ♖g8



in which there have only been 16 games since May 2016 (with an excellent score for Black: +4, =12). So, a quick application of the lines in this DVD will definitely give you the element of surprise!

In general, I can’t fault the content on the DVD. Vidit has done a very conscientious job putting together an interesting and varied repertory and providing a few new little ideas to tidy up problems in lines he recommends. He addresses move order problems throughout the DVD (I found this particularly useful in his treatment of the Short System of the Advance Variation – 1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 ♗f5

**The Fashionable Caro-Kann Vol. 1: Main Lines and Side Lines**
**by Vidit Gujrathi**
**DVD FritzTrainer**
**ChessBase, 2017**
★★☆☆☆

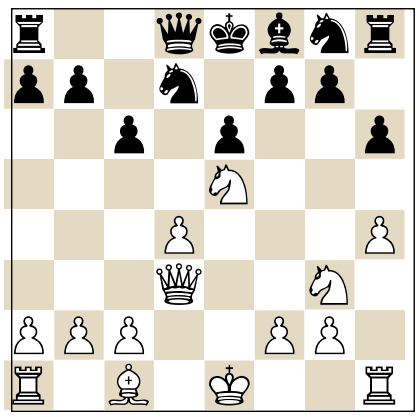



**The Fashionable Caro-Kann Vol. 2: Advance Variation 3.e5 Bf5**
**by Vidit Gujrathi**
**DVD FritzTrainer**
**ChessBase 2017**
★★★☆☆

4.♘f3 e6) and he ends each chapter with a good summary which should help the viewer memorize the information.

Thinking about the target audience for the DVD, this DVD would help experienced Caro-Kann players to expand/deepen their existing repertoire. I wouldn't recommend this DVD on its own to the average player looking to learn the Caro-Kann from scratch. I think that such a player would get confused by Vidit's guidance and remarks.

For example, take the line 1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4 4.♘xe4 ♗f5 5.♘g3 ♗g6 6.h4 h6 7.♘f3 e6 8.♘e5 ♗h7 9.♗d3 ♗xd3 10.♕xd3 ♘d7.



Quite a lot of confusing stuff is happening here. Vidit mentions that 7...e6 (instead of the old main line 7...♘d7) gives Black the opportunity to play ...c5 and place his knight on c6, or to activate his queen via d5, all of which would not be possible with the knight on d7. However, three moves later Black places his knight on d7 anyway! Another point: why does White exchange off the light-squared bishops on move 9 when he had the chance to do it earlier? What has changed? Vidit explains why 9.♗d3 is tactically possible (9...♕xd4 loses to 10.♘xf7) but there's more to it than that: why does White want to do it anyway?

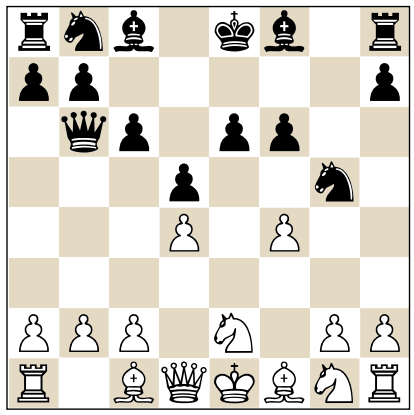
These inconsistencies, exceptions and subtleties are part and parcel of the professional player's existence and a strong player will accept and assimilate such things without batting an eyelid. However, an amateur player coming to the opening for the first time would find it tough to remember the 16 moves leading to the main branch of Vidit's analysis in this line without an understanding of such points.

If you were looking to use this DVD to learn the Caro-Kann, then you would probably need a blended approach, combining this DVD with some general instructional books. Looking at my own library, I can unreservedly recommend Peter Wells' *Grandmaster Secrets – The Caro-Kann* (Gambit), which although slightly dated (it was written in 2007) does a wonderful job of explaining the logic of both White's and Black's opening setups with a minimum of variations. Jovanka Houska's recent book *Opening Repertoire: the Caro-Kann* (Everyman) – is a little uneven: I feel that the author sometimes loses herself in the reams of variations and move-order subtleties, particularly in the Classical 3.♘c3 lines, but the book contains many useful positional hints and observations distilled from practical experience from which a Caro-Kann 'noob' would greatly benefit.

**'I don't know about you, but my mental image of the Caro-Kann is more of old men at the chess club smoking pipes than of fast cars, loose women and designer clothes!'**

My final thoughts concern presentation. I had some slight problems with Vidit's presentation style in Part 1. The ratio of 'Umms' to a sentence was (for me) disturbingly high while Vidit's tendency to slouch back and speak with his hand in front of his mouth took my thoughts back to my school days and my teacher's occasional exasperated 'Sadler, sit up and for God's sake speak clearly!' I thought Vidit's presentation was much better in Part 2, though I have the feeling that Part 2 was recorded first. Possibly he was flagging after a long recording session!

The second is a rather more serious complaint. In the chapter on the Two Knights Variation in Part 1, Vidit recommends the thrillingly risky 1.e4 c6 2.♘c3 d5 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e5 ♘e4 5.♘e2 ♕b6 6.d4 e6 7.♘fg1 f6 8.f3 ♘g5 9.exf6 gxf6 and now 10.f4.



In Chapter 13 (11 minutes) the thrust of the chapter from the 5th minute onwards is that 10...♘e4 is a poor move. In the 7th minute, Vidit thus recommends 10...♘f7 and explains why this is a better move than 10...♘e4. In the 11th minute, Vidit says: 'So after 11.♘f3, let me just umm... promote this...' and the chapter stops. Dead. The next chapter starts with Vidit in a completely different setting (at home), with

appalling sound quality, explaining that 10...♘e4 is the best move after all!

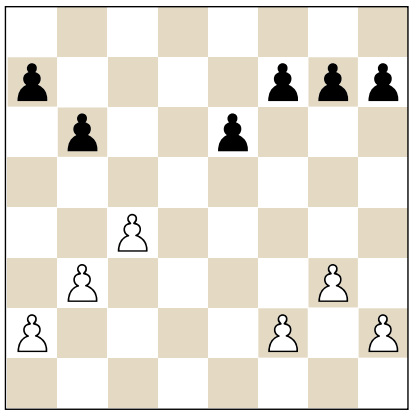
It looks completely amateurish and doesn't make any sense at all. How much does this matter? With a fair bit of goodwill and patience you can eventually get to grips with what Vidit means but on the other hand... If I compare the 40 euro I spent on this product to the Classical music / Opera / Ballet DVD's or the exam preparation DVD's for IT exams I buy (for less), there's an ocean-wide gap in production quality. To be honest, this type of quality would be acceptable for free self-published content, but you'd hope for a bit more from a professional product.

From a stars point of view, I feel inclined to just award 2 stars to Part 1, and 3 stars to Part 2. On the content alone, it would have been higher for both, but in the end the presentation glitches ruined the experience for me somewhat.

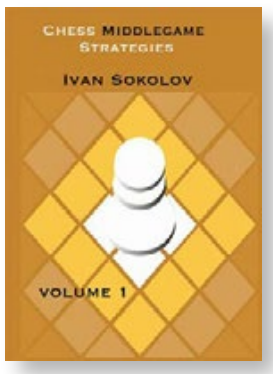
■ ■ ■

From DVD's we move on to *Chess Middlegame Strategies* by Ivan Sokolov, a recent offering from the new publishing house Thinkers Publishing.

Ivan examines nine complex themes: Unusual Rook Lifts, Backward Knight Moves, Backward Bishop Moves, Minority vs Majority, Voluntary Pawn Structure Damage, Opposite-coloured Bishops, Defending with Limited Resources, Voluntary King Run and Material Imbalance. Each theme is examined via the detailed analysis of one or more example games. For example, the superb chapter on Minority vs Majority examines this typical pawn structure



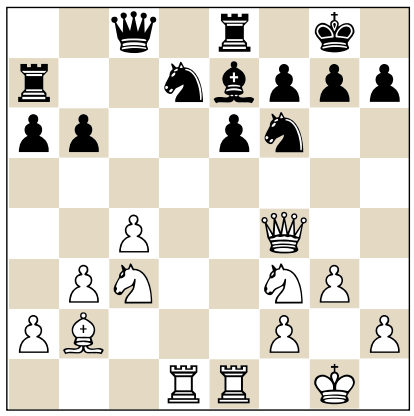
**Chess Middlegame Strategies Volume 1**
**by Ivan Sokolov**
**Thinkers Publishing, 2017**
★★★★★




through a total of five examples, both modern and classical. At the end, there is a set of 26 exercises to test the reader's understanding of the book's content.

I was talking with John Nunn a couple of years ago about good and bad books, and he said that the hallmark of a really good book was that the author looked for patterns and trends within complicated material and dared to draw conclusions from his analysis. You might not necessarily agree with the author's conclusions completely, but this courage and intelligence was what made a book thought-provoking and fascinating. On this criterion, this is a *really* good book. Take the chapter Minority vs Majority as an example. I have studied and played such types of structures many times, but I have never seen any of the seven ideas that Sokolov proposes explained in such a clear and cogent manner.

Just one example: to whose advantage is the exchange of the c-pawn for the b-pawn (for example if Black achieves the ...b6-b5 break)?

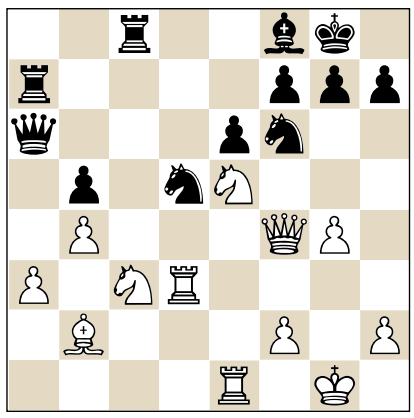


**Portisch-Andersson**
Milan 1975
position after 21.♔g1

**21...b5 22.cxb5 axb5**

Using this classic game as a basis for his investigations, Sokolov concludes that the break favours Black (despite the fact that it helps White to create a remote passed pawn on the queenside) because Black gains the d5-square for his pieces (the knight in particular).

**23.b4 ♕a6 24.a3 ♘b6 25.♘e5 ♖c8 26.♖d3 ♗f8 27.g4 ♘bd5**



**28.♘xd5 ♘xd5 29.♕d4 f6 30.♖h3 fxe5 31.♕xe5 ♖f7 32.♕h5 h6 33.♖g3 ♖c2 34.♗d4 ♘f4 35.♕e5 ♕d6 36.♕e4 ♖c4** 0-1.

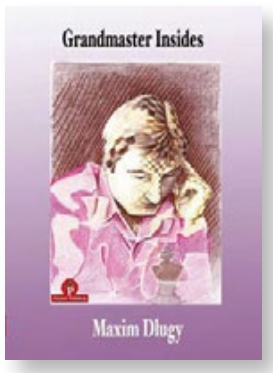
A wonderful insight and one that suddenly made sense of a number of positions I had analysed in the past. At the recent Limburg Open, I reached one of these structures and I can't tell you how grandmasterly I felt as I enumerated Sokolov's ideas in this structure before getting down to analysing the specifics!

Another chapter that appealed to me greatly was that on material imbalance, in particular the first section in which Sokolov examines queen vs 3 minor piece middlegame positions. Sokolov postulates three general rules for playing these exceedingly difficult positions and then shows how these rules work (and sometimes fail!) through the deep analysis of two games: Timman-Lahno, Marianske Lazne 2009, and Tiviakov-Sokolov, Groningen 1994.

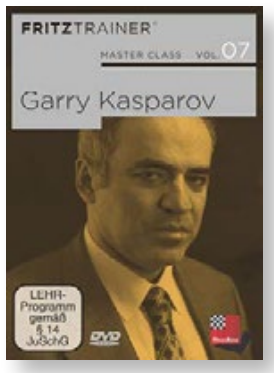
As you can imagine, this is an advanced book with much (often spectacular) analysis. It isn't a book you can just pick up and flick through – I needed to play through the lines on the board to really understand the variations properly – but for any player looking for inspiration and guidance about the more complicated side of middlegame strategy, this book is a must. Really impressed!

■ ■ ■

**Grandmaster Insides**
**The Inner World of Maxim Dlugy**
**by Maxim Dlugy**
**Thinkers Publishing, 2017**
★★★★☆




**Master Class Vol. 7**
**Garry Kasparov**
**by Rogozenco, Müller, Marin, Reeh**
**ChessBase, 2016**
★★★★☆




It was raining Thinkers Publishing books last month, as I also received *Grandmaster Insides* by Maxim Dlugy through the post as well. This is a little bit of everything – a Best Games collection, a biography, an art collection (there are 15 colour pages in the middle dedicated to 'Dlugy's drawings'), a training manual and an opening book. The style is fast-moving and informal and it reads as if it was dictated rather than written, but that's no bad thing!

Dlugy stopped his professional career pretty much when I started mine so I knew very little about him before reading this book. His name cropped up all over my files on my favourite opening at the time – the Queen's Gambit Accepted – but of course he was much more than that. He's been a strong player, rubbed shoulders with lots of the greats, prepared Deep Blue for its match against Kasparov, followed a successful business career and then returned to chess as a chess coach at his own Academy.

The book reflects this wide-ranging involvement with chess. Roughly speaking, the first part of the book is focused on the development of a young player (using Dlugy's own experiences as a model) and on preparation; the second part is similar to Seirawan's *Chess Duels: My Games with the World Champions*, as Dlugy describes his most interesting and inspirational games and meetings with the world's greatest; the final part presents a number of games from critical practical situations and also a number of memorable games.

I'm sure that this is the type of book I would have loved as a kid. So much varied content, lots of opening ideas, exciting games and anecdotes about encounters with the big names of chess. I think it would also be the perfect summer holiday book for the keen chess player, looking to while away his days at the beach with something a little more rewarding than a John Grisham thriller! I thoroughly enjoyed it!

**'The perfect summer holiday book for the keen chess player, looking to while away his days at the beach with something a little more rewarding than a John Grisham thriller!'**

The only thing that grated with the purist in me was Dlugy's assessment of the pros and cons of blitz. As you can imagine with such a fine blitz player, Dlugy is very keen on blitz as a training method, listing nine advantages to playing blitz and just one disadvantage.

My take on blitz as a training method is that all chess practice should be purposeful. Every time you work at chess, you should attempt to muster maximum concentration and make every moment you spend on specific positions count to the utmost. Every ounce of chess work has to *matter*. In that way, when you play a classical game of 8 hours, you are attuned to the patient work of unravelling the nuances of the single game in front of you, and you are capable of making a sustained effort of analysis or defence where required.

I've always found that playing blitz ruins this frame of mind. In particular, the fact that lost games matter so little – after all, the next game is just a couple of minutes away – destroys your ability to concentrate in inferior positions or defend for long stretches.

I'd be interested to know how other people feel about this. Certainly, if you look at how much blitz the top players play nowadays, you don't really have the feeling that it's affecting their chess too much! I have the horrible suspicion that I'm already descending into old fogeyness... I'll be playing the Queen's Gambit Declined next.

That digression aside, thoroughly recommended!

■ ■ ■

And finally on to *Master Class Vol. 7: Garry Kasparov* (ChessBase), which was part of my training for a rare tournament outing of mine at the Limburg Open last month. The week before a tournament, I always like to get some fresh input into my game – new positional ideas, analysing the games of a little-known player – just to give me the feeling that there's more to chess life than desperately cramming opening variations into your head at the last minute!

The Master Class DVD's are perfect for this. A lovely mixture of tactics, endgames, overview of opening choices, and – if you're lucky – some more wonderful middlegame analysis from Mihail Marin! And we are lucky this time! Kasparov's games are familiar to every chess player, but Marin succeeds time and time again in highlighting unexpected details and hidden critical moments, while presenting them in an open manner that is very easy to follow. It's the most relaxed way of learning I've come across so far. I also enjoyed Rogozenco's thorough overview of Kasparov's openings, and while I'm not a particular fan of Karsten Müller's presentation skills, there is always plenty to admire in his endgame analysis. A very appropriate tribute to the world's greatest ever player, and very instructive to boot! ■

Jan Timman

# Maxim Matlakov European Champion

Most favourites at the European Championship in Minsk were probably hoping to qualify for the World Cup rather than winning the title. **JAN TIMMAN** looks at the top finishers.

The individual Euro championship was first held in the year 2000 in Saint-Vincent, in the foothills of the Italian Alps, so it's a tradition started in this century. It has never laid claim to being a representative competition in the sense that the tournament would yield the strongest player in Europe, simply because the playing conditions don't measure up. All players are expected to pay for their own travel expenses and accommodation, which means that the top players are bound to stay away. But a striking number of second-echelon players do take part every year, attracted by the generous prize-fund and the chance to qualify for the World Cup.

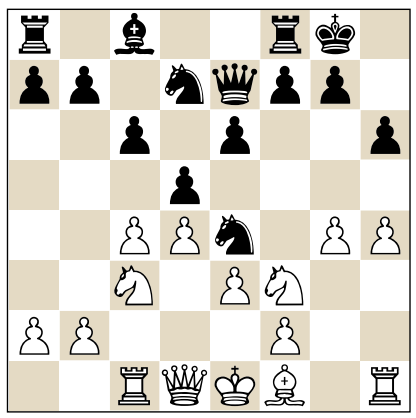
This year, the championship was held in Minsk, with 22 qualification spots on offer. As per tradition, anyone could sign up, and 397 people did – a pretty large number, but not a record. Dresden 2007 and Rijeka 2010 had slightly over 400 participants. The strength of the event was impressive: it boasted 170 grandmasters, half of whom had a 2600+ rating and nine of whom were 2700 or over. The field was led by Navara with 2739.

As a rule – and in Minsk it was no different – you need 8 out of 11 to ensure qualification. With 7½ you do not know what to expect. In the past, you'd be eligible for rapid tiebreaks, but those are gone. Qualification is determined by Buchholz, with the unsatisfactory result that you may have to go into the final round without knowing what result to go for, as the Buchholz differences can be very small. The top players generally try to score a minimum of 5½ out of 7 in order to be within reach of qualification, but in Minsk, the situation after seven rounds was quite surprising: 13 players were on 6 or 5½ points, but Matlakov was the only 2700+ player amongst them. In the end, only three players from the club of 2700 had qualified: Matlakov, Jobava and Navara.

The Sofia rules do not apply in the European Championship, with the result that peaceful draws are no exception towards the end. In Minsk this was not too bad. In Round 10, Matlakov defeated Howell, who had been leading the tournament with 7½ out of 9.

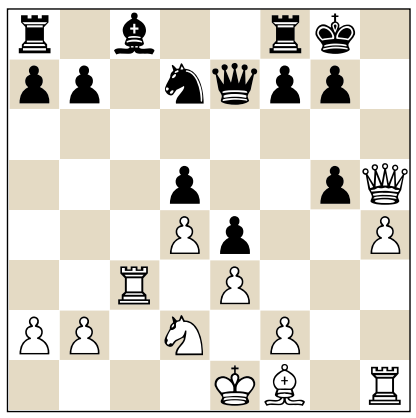
**Maxim Matlakov**
**David Howell**
Minsk 2017 (10)
Queen's Gambit Declined

**1.c4 e6 2.♘c3 d5 3.d4 ♗e7 4.♘f3 ♘f6 5.♗g5 h6 6.♗h4 0-0 7.e3 ♘e4 8.♗xe7 ♕xe7 9.♖c1 c6 10.g4 ♘d7 11.h4**



The advancing kingside has become very fashionable since Aronian introduced it into chess practice against Harikrishna six years ago, and interestingly enough, it seems to make no difference which pawn White advances first, the h-pawn or the g-pawn.

**11...e5 12.cxd5 ♘xc3 13.♖xc3 cxd5 14.g5 e4 15.♘d2 hxg5 16.♕h5** This is still a theoretical position, but Howell had already used a lot of time and didn't seem to be up to date with all the finesses.

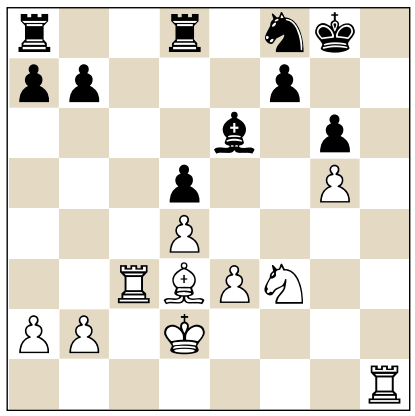


**16...g6** The critical move is 16...g4, after which the white queen can capture two pawns. 17.♕xd5 is probably

the way to get an opening advantage. The text-move is less committal, but will lead to a strategically superior endgame for White.

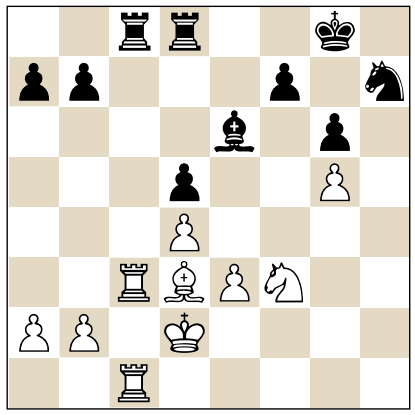
**17.♕xg5 ♕xg5 18.hxg5 ♖d8 19.f3 exf3 20.♘xf3 ♘f8 21.♗d3 ♗e6 22.♔d2**

White's plus is modest enough, but it's a lasting one. All his pieces will end up being more active than Black's, and his set-up will be marginally better, too.



**22...♖ac8 23.♖hc1 ♘h7**

A better defence would have been 23...♔g7. The knight is misplaced on h7.



**24.a4!**

Matlakov wants to gain space on the queenside, but leaves his b-pawn where it is. The reason for this will become clear later.

**24...♖xc3**

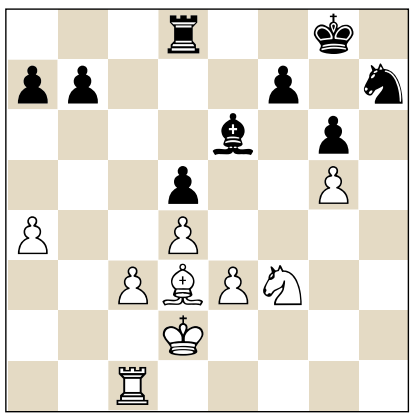
The second inaccuracy, which probably makes Black's position untenable. He should have played the waiting move 24...♔g7.

**25.bxc3**

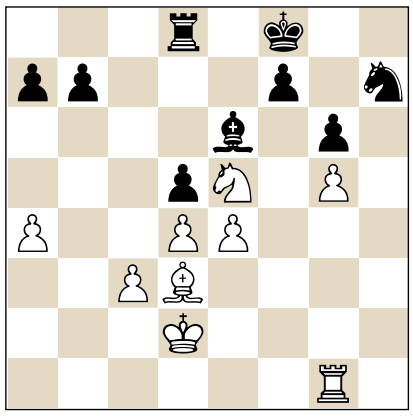
This is the problem. By recapturing as he does, White improves his structure and will now start aiming for e3-e4.

ETERI KUBLASHVILI

**Maxim Matlakov is the new European Champion. The 26-year-old GM from St. Petersburg was also one of the 22 contenders that qualified for the World Cup in Tbilisi in September.**



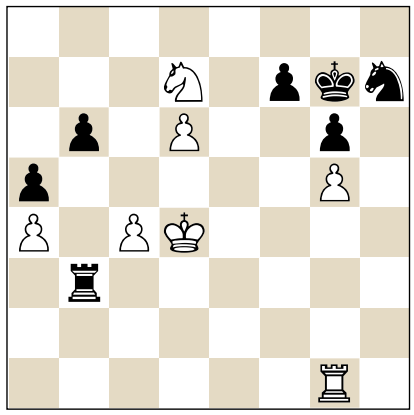
**25...♗g4 26.♘e5 ♗e6 27.♖g1 ♔f8 28.e4**



With great force, especially because the white knight is so much more active than its black counterpart.

**28...b6 29.♔e3 dxe4 30.♗xe4 ♗b3 31.♗c6 ♗d5** 31...♖d6 would have been slightly more tenacious.

**32.c4 ♗xc6 33.♘xc6 ♖e8+ 34.♔d3 a5 35.d5 ♔g7 36.♔d4 ♖e2 37.♘e5 ♖d2+ 38.♔c3 ♖e2 39.♘d7 ♖e3+ 40.♔d4 ♖b3 41.d6**



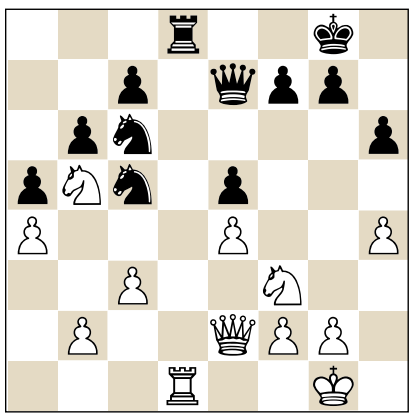
The d-pawn will decide the issue.

**41...♖b2 42.♔d5 ♖d2+ 43.♔c6 ♖d4 44.♘xb6 ♘f8 45.c5 ♘e6 46.♖e1 ♔f8 47.♖xe6 fxe6 48.♔d7** Black resigned.

**'In the end, only three players from the club of 2700 had qualified: Matlakov, Jobava and Navara.'**

This game showed us Matlakov from his best side: strong and solid positional play, good planning and good execution. Matlakov has a well thought-out opening repertoire, and with a TPR of 2834 he was a deserving winner. In the final round, however, his tournament almost derailed.

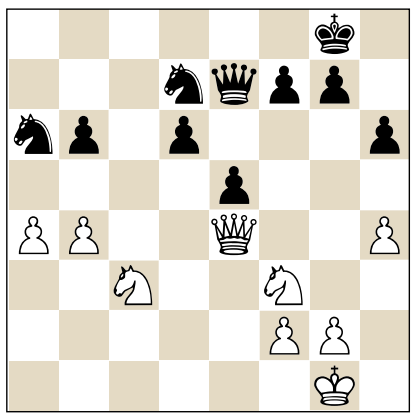
**Baadur Jobava**
**Maxim Matlakov**
Minsk 2017 (11)



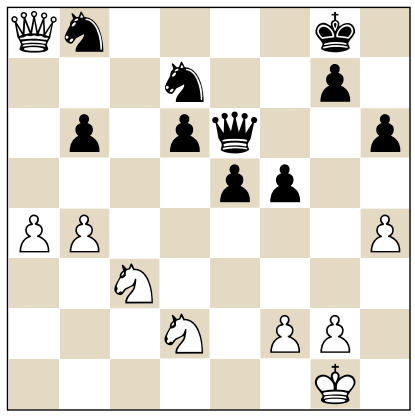
position after 30...♘c5

Jobava had reached the top of the standings in a very different manner from Matlakov; by losing in Rounds 2 and 3 and then wining seven games on the trot. Matlakov was happy to settle for a draw, since his Buchholz was clearly better. For the same reason, Jobava was determined to win, especially because he had already qualified for the World Cup. His Philidor with colours reversed has not yielded much in the way of an advantage, but Black still has to be careful.

**31.♖d5**
The only way to exert pressure.
**31...♖xd5**
The simplest way to solve Black's positional problems. He could also have ceded the d-file to White with 31...♖c8.
**32.exd5 ♘b8 33.b4 axb4 34.cxb4 ♘cd7 35.♕e4 ♘a6 36.d6 cxd6 37.♘c3**



**37...♕e6**
It seems obvious to contest the central square d5, but the best defence against the queen's activity was 37...♕d8!.
**38.♘d2 f5 39.♕a8+ ♘ab8**



**40.a5**
The notorious 40th move. Far stronger, and probably winning, was 40.♘d5!, when the black knights have to continue covering each other in their awkward way, while the queen is cut off from the defence of the queenside. White will simply win the b-pawn, after which he will have two connected passed pawns, e.g. 40...e4 41.♘f1 ♔h7 42.♕b7, followed by a capture on b6.
**40...bxa5 41.bxa5 d5** Now everything works out exactly right for Black.
**42.♘xd5 ♔f7 43.♘c4 ♕c6 44.♕xc6 ♘xc6 45.a6 ♘a7 46.h5 ♘c5 47.♘b4 ♔f6 48.♔h2 e4 49.f4** Draw.

Jobava's games are nearly always worthwhile. In Round 9, he scored a smooth win against Jones.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**Gawain Jones**
**Baadur Jobava**
Minsk 2017 (9)
English Opening

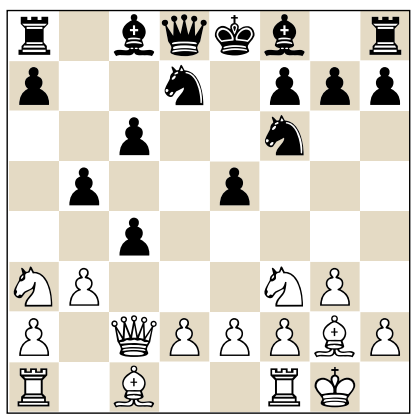
**1.c4 c6 2.♘f3 d5 3.g3 dxc4 4.♗g2 ♘d7**

Jobava usually finds his own way in the opening. In this variation, Black normally has developed his knight to f6 already. Here, Jobava's approach yields Black extra options.

**5.♘a3 e5 6.♕c2** The best reply as after 6.♘xc4 e4 the white king's knight has no good squares left.

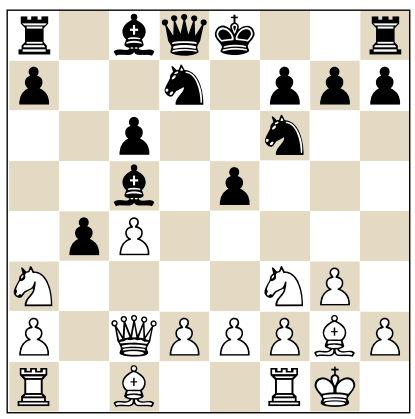
**6...b5 7.0-0 ♘gf6 8.b3**

A standard move, but not the best reply here. White should have gone 8.d4! when, after 8...cxd3 9.exd3 ♗b7 10.♖e1, he will win back the pawn with a good position.



**8...♗c5!** Well spotted. Black is aiming for a strategic blockade of the white position.

**9.bxc4 b4**

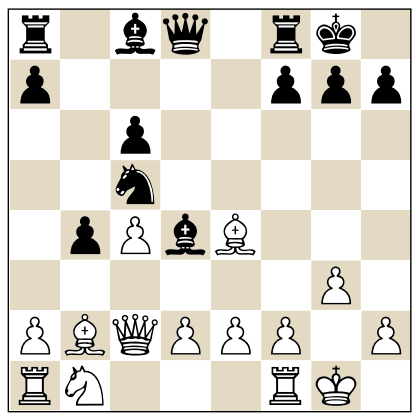


**10.♘b1?**

This retreat makes Jobava's opening strategy a complete success. It was not so easy to see, but White should have sacrificed a pawn with 10.d4. After 10...exd4 11.♘b1 0-0 12.♘bd2 a5 13.♗b2 White wins the pawn back, with roughly equal chances.

**10...e4!** Preparing a strong positional pawn sacrifice.

**11.♘g5 ♗d4 12.♗b2 ♘c5 13.♘xe4 ♘fxe4 14.♗xe4 0-0**

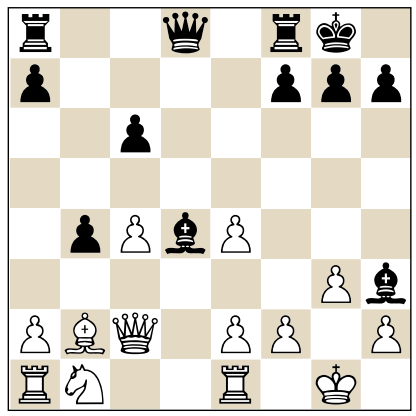


The point. After 15.♗g2 ♕f6 White would unexpectedly lose a piece.

**15.d3** White has no choice. He has no way to prevent his king's bishop from being swapped, after which he will be subject to a strong attack.

**15...♘xe4 16.dxe4 ♗h3 17.♖e1**

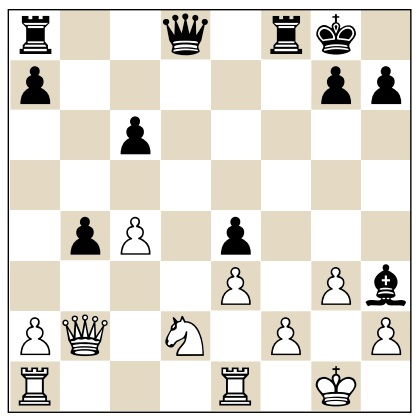
Certainly not 17.♖d1 in view of 17...♗xb2, and wins.



**17...f5!**

Again, strong and energetic play.

**18.e3 ♗xb2 19.♕xb2 fxe4 20.♘d2**



**20...♕e7**

A natural move. Black protects the b-pawn and connects his rooks.

Yet the computer regards 20...♕e8, for a subsequent sortie to h5, as stronger here. Black needn't worry about his b-pawn. He will win in the attack.

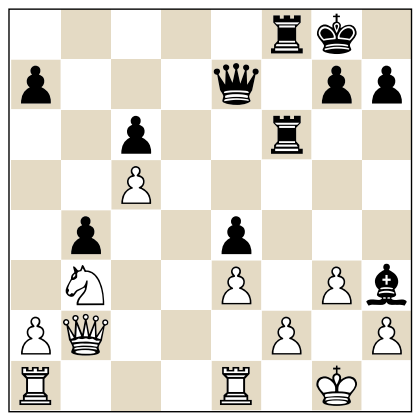
**21.♘b3 ♖f6**

Jobava goes charging in at once, but the strategic 21...c5 would have been stronger.

**22.c5**

In any case, White will have square d4 for the knight now.

**22...♖af8**



**23.♖ac1?**

Jones had defended well after his opening had misfired, but this is a blunder that loses on the spot. 23.♖e2 would have kept his chances of a successful defence alive.

**23...♖xf2 24.♕xf2 ♖xf2 25.♔xf2 ♕f6+**

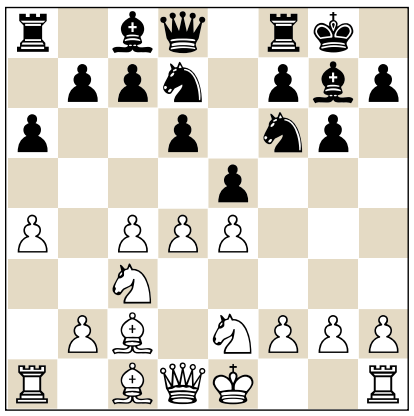
White resigned. He must have overlooked the devastating effect of the black queen penetrating on b2.

Twenty-two-year-old Fedoseev also managed to garner 8½ points. Like Jobava, he lost two games in a row, albeit not at the start but halfway the tournament. His final dash was impressive. Vladislav Artemiev, three years his junior, was initially hailed as the great new promise of Russian chess, but now the spotlight has fallen on Fedoseev, who has risen to the 30th spot in the world rankings. Fedoseev is not an opening expert pur sang, but tends to steer for positions with dynamic possibilities.

He also has excellent technique. In Round 9 he steamrolled Saric.

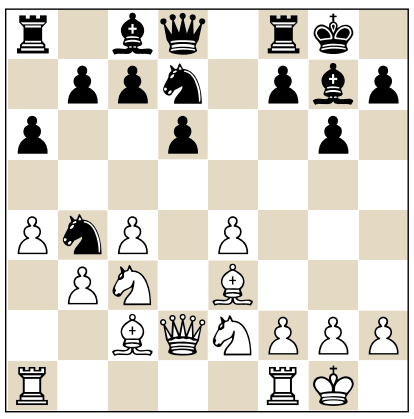
**Vladimir Fedoseev**
**Ivan Saric**
Minsk 2017 (9)
King's Indian

**1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 d6 5.♗d3 0-0 6.♘ge2 ♘bd7 7.♗c2 a6 8.a4 e5**



**9.0-0**
In Seirawan-Ivanchuk, Reykjavik 1991, there followed 9.d5 a5! 10.h3 ♘c5 11.♗e3 ♘fd7, with good play for Black. Fedoseev's idea is better. White must maintain the central tension.

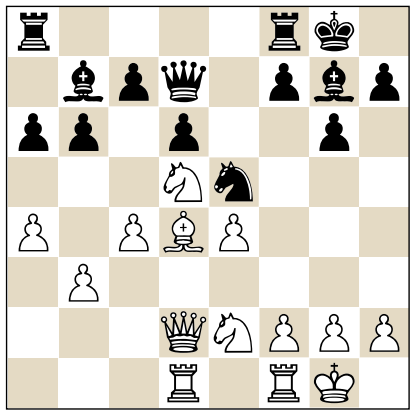
**9...exd4 10.♘xd4 ♘e5 11.b3 ♘c6 12.♘de2 ♘d7 13.♗e3 ♘b4 14.♕d2**



White doesn't mind giving up the bishop pair. He controls the centre.

**14...♘e5**
A pointless exercise. The knight will be forcibly driven from its central square later on. Good moves for Black were 14...a5 and 14...♖e8.

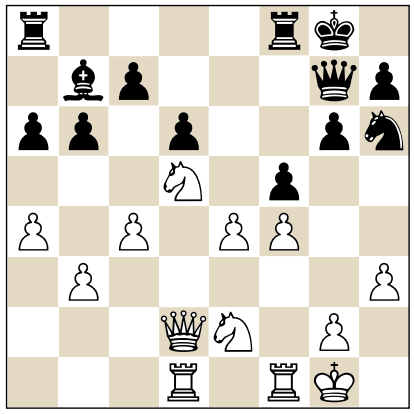
**15.♖ad1 ♘xc2 16.♕xc2 b6 17.♕d2 ♗b7 18.♘d5 ♕d7 19.♗d4**



Classical play. White exploits his central superiority to the full. He is going to prepare the advance of his f-pawn.

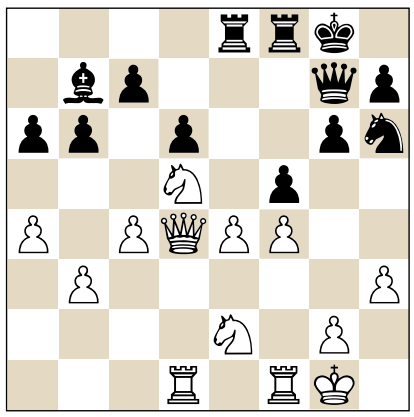
**19...f5 20.f4 ♘g4 21.h3 ♘h6**
A very bad square for the knight. Correct was 21...♘f6, with some chances of survival.

**22.♗xg7 ♕xg7**

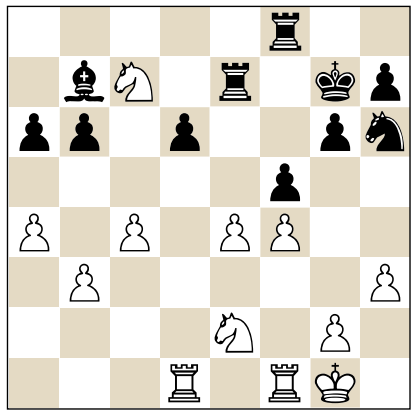


**23.♕d4!**
The most convincing way for White to increase his advantage. After the queen swap Black will find it very hard to protect his c-pawn.

**23...♖ae8**
Overlooking a winning turn, but the position was probably untenable anyway.



**24.♕xg7+ ♔xg7 25.♘xc7 ♖e7**



**26.♘d4!**
Winning another pawn, while keeping his strategic advantage. The rest is simple.

**26...♔f7 27.♘d5 ♖xe4 28.♘xb6 ♖e3 29.b4 ♖fe8 30.c5 dxc5 31.bxc5 ♔g8 32.c6 ♗c8 33.♘d5**
Black resigned. ■

**Minsk 2017**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Maxim Matlakov | RUS | 2714 | 8½ |
| 2 | Baadur Jobava | GEO | 2713 | 8½ |
| 3 | Vladimir Fedoseev | RUS | 2690 | 8½ |
| 4 | Daniel Fridman | GER | 2605 | 8 |
| 5 | Ivan Cheparinov | ECX | 2688 | 8 |
| 6 | Alexander Motylev | RUS | 2665 | 8 |
| 7 | Jan-Krzysztof Duda | POL | 2693 | 8 |
| 8 | David Navara | CZE | 2739 | 8 |
| 9 | David Howell | ENG | 2684 | 8 |
| 10 | Martyn Kravtsiv | UKR | 2653 | 8 |
| 11 | Alexander Areshchenko | UKR | 2677 | 8 |
| 12 | Matthias Blübaum | GER | 2632 | 8 |
| 13 | Boris Grachev | RUS | 2658 | 8 |
| 14 | Vitaly Kunin | GER | 2551 | 8 |
| 15 | Benjamin Bok | NED | 2598 | 7½ |
| 16 | Gawain Jones | ENG | 2654 | 7½ |
| 17 | Daniil Dubov | RUS | 2660 | 7½ |
| 18 | Etienne Bacrot | FRA | 2696 | 7½ |
| 19 | Hrant Melkumyan | ARM | 2613 | 7½ |
| 20 | Dimitrios Mastrovasilis | GRE | 2580 | 7½ |
| 21 | Sergei Zhigalko | BLR | 2643 | 7½ |
| 22 | Vladislav Artemiev | RUS | 2682 | 7½ |
| 23 | Maxim Rodshtein | ISR | 2698 | 7½ |
| 24 | Aleksei Aleksandrov | BLR | 2559 | 7½ |
| 25 | Evgeny Tomashevsky | RUS | 2696 | 7½ |
| 26 | Viktor Erdös | HUN | 2614 | 7½ |
| 27 | Yuri Kuzubov | UKR | 2637 | 7½ |
| 28 | Luka Lenic | SLO | 2641 | 7½ |
| 29 | Alexander Riazantsev | RUS | 2659 | 7½ |
| 30 | Haik Martirosyan | ARM | 2516 | 7½ |

397 players, 11 rounds

The first 22 qualified for the World Cup

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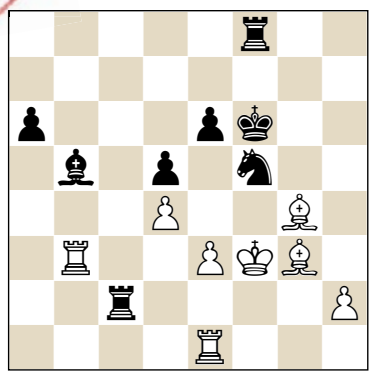
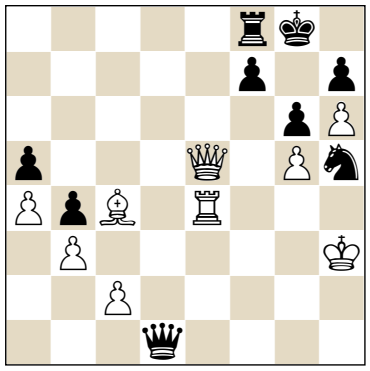


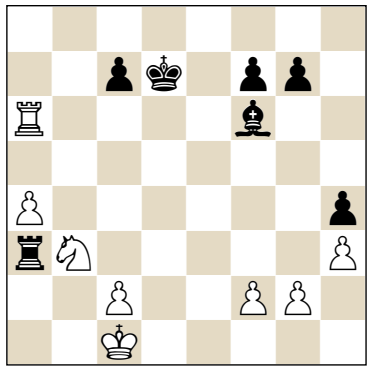
**1. Weidemann-Buhmann**
Karlsruhe 2017

**40...♘xd4+! 41.exd4 ♔g5+!** White resigned as after 42.♔e3 ♔xg4 he is a pawn down. Moreover, there's no sufficient defence against 42...♖f3 mate.



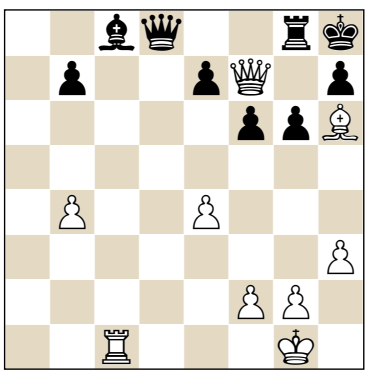
**2. Abdulov-Muradli**
Nakhchivan 2017

White is first to give check: **47.♗xf7+! ♖xf7** 47...♔xf7 48.♕e6 mate is less entertaining. **48.♕h8+!** (48...♔xh8 49.♖e8+). Black resigned.



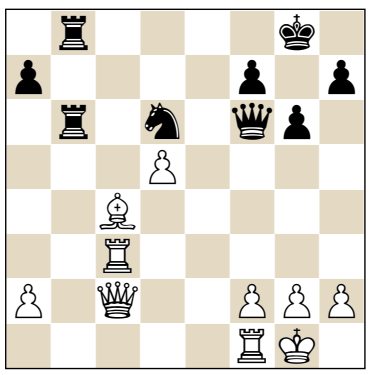
**3. Areshchenko-Hracek**
Minsk 2017

**37.♖xf6!** forced a quick resignation on account of 37...gxf6 38.♔b2 ♖xa4 (the pawn ending is dead lost as well) 39.♘c5+.



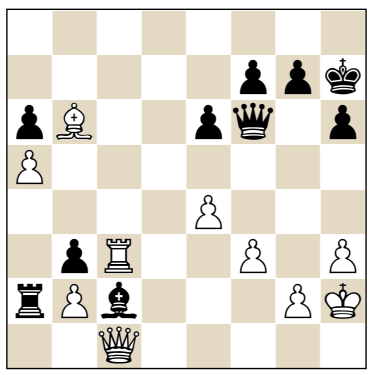
**4. Grandelius-Nielsen**
Sweden 2017

**28.e5! fxe5** 28...♕e8 29.♗g7+. **29.♖xc8! ♕xc8 30.♕xe7 ♕f5 31.g4** Black resigned as his queen can't control both e5 and f6. The immediate 28.♖xc8 ♕xc8 29.♕xe7 would have been parried by 29...♕c3.



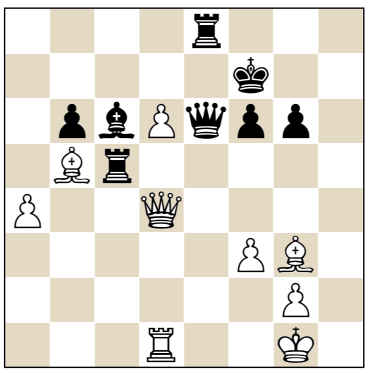
**5. Altini-Brunello**
Italia 2017

**23...♖c8 24.♖c1 ♖xc4! 25.♖xc4 ♖b2 26.♖c8+ ♔g7!** The final finesse, which prevents White from regaining the piece after 27.♕c3 ♘xc8 due to the weakness of the back rank. White resigned.



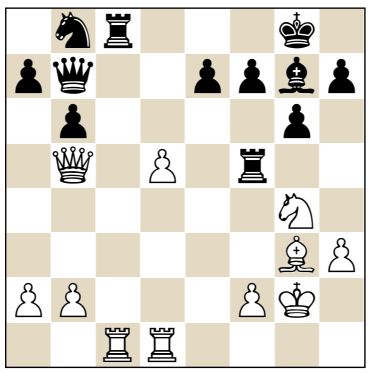
**6. Kurbedinov-Sarana**
Sochi 2017

**33...♕e5+! 34.f4 ♕xc3! 35.bxc3 ♗xe4** White resigned as the b-pawn is unstoppable. After the direct 33...♕xc3 34.bxc3 ♗d3 35.♕d1 b2 36.♕xd3 ♖a1 37.e5+ ♔g8 (37...g6?! 38.♕d7) 38.♕d8+ White could draw.



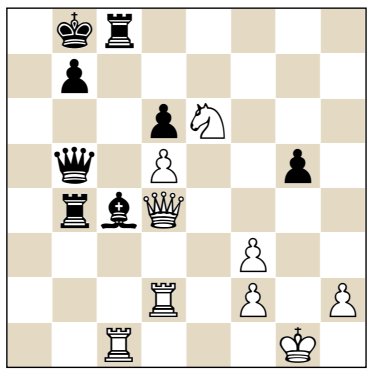
**7. Kjartansson-V. Stefansson**
Iceland 2017

**34.♕xc5! bxc5 35.♗xc6 ♕e3+** Avoiding 36.♗d5. **36.♗f2** Now after taking on e8 and 38.d7+ the bishop always outplays the queen: **36...♕c3 37.♗xe8+ ♔xe8 38.d7+ ♔d8 39.♗e1 ♕e3+ 40.♔f1** Black resigned.



**8. Heberla-Ris**
Germany 2016

**26.♖c7! ♖xc7 27.♕e8+ ♗f8 28.♘h6+ ♔g7 29.♘xf5+ gxf5 30.♗e5+ f6 31.♔h2! ♕c8 32.♖g1+ ♔h8** If 32...♔h6 33.♗f4 mate. **33.♕f7 ♗h6 34.d6! ♘c6** If 34...fxe5 35.dxc7 ♘d7 36.♖g8+! and 38.c8♕+. **35.dxe7** Black resigned.



**9. Iljushenok-Andriasyan**
Minsk 2017

**55.♖a2! ♕b6** 55...♗xa2 56.♖xc8+ ♔xc8 57.♕h8+ ♔d7 58.♕d8 mate; 55...b6 56.♕g7!. **56.♕a1! ♗xa2 57.♖xc8+ ♔xc8 58.♕h8+ ♔d7** Now d8 is protected but... **59.♕g7+ ♔e8 60.♕f8+** Black resigned in view of mate in 3.

Just Checking

# Vidit Gujrathi

**CURRENT ELO:** 2693

**DATE OF BIRTH:** October 24, 1994

**PLACE OF BIRTH:** Indore, India

**PLACE OF RESIDENCE:** Nasik, India

**What is your favourite city?**
All the cities of Holland.

**What was the last great meal you had?**
With my family on the occasion of my parents' anniversary.

**What drink brings a smile to your face?**
A nice cup of tea.

**Which book would you give to a dear friend?**
*Russians vs. Fischer* (Plisetsky & Voronkov).

**What book is currently on your bed-side table?**
*The Power of Habit* by Charles Duhigg.

**What is your all-time favourite movie?**
*The Shawshank Redemption*.

**And your favourite TV series?**
*Friends*, *Sherlock*.

**Do you have a favourite actor?**
Heath Ledger was superb as the Joker.

**And a favourite actress?**
Kaley Cuoco.

**Is there a work of art that moves you?**
I know too little about it.

**Who is your favourite chess player of all time?**
Garry Kasparov, because of his domination. How can one win so many tournaments?

**Is there a chess book that had a profound influence on you?**
Countless. But in recent times *Positional Decision Making* by Gelfand was very enjoyable.

**What was your best result ever?**
Winning the Category-16 Lake Sevan tournament twice.

**And the best game you played?**
Against Sam Sevian in the French Defence (Lake Sevan 2015, ½-½, 51). At one point almost every piece was pinned!

**What was the most exciting chess game you ever saw?**
Rather than games, some brilliant ideas stick to my memory. Ivanchuk-Shirov: ♕g7!!, Ivanchuk-Karjakin: ♕xe6!!, Kasparov-Shirov: ♖xb7!!, etc.

**What is your favourite square?**
If I have to pick, e4.

**Do chess players have typical shortcomings?**
Many chess players are unusually superstitious and quite stubborn.

**What are chess players particularly good at (except for chess)?**
In taking calculated risks. And also, in general they are good people. ☺

**Do you have any superstitions concerning chess?**
I try to maintain a routine throughout the tournament.

**How many friends do you have on Facebook?**
Around 4000 or something.

**Who do you follow on Twitter?**
Not many people. Mainly chess related handles.

**What is your life motto?**
To be better than yesterday.

**When were you happiest?**
Winning feels nice. ☺

**When was the last time you cried?**
Not long ago.

**Which three people would you like to invite for dinner?**
Aristotle, Muhammad Ali, Buddha.

**What is the best piece of advice you have ever been ever given?**
By Rocky Balboa! 'It ain't about how hard you hit, but how hard you get hit and keep moving forward. How much you can take and keep moving forward.'

**Is there something you'd love to learn?**
Playing the guitar would be cool.

**What is your greatest fear?**
To be sad and have regrets in old age.

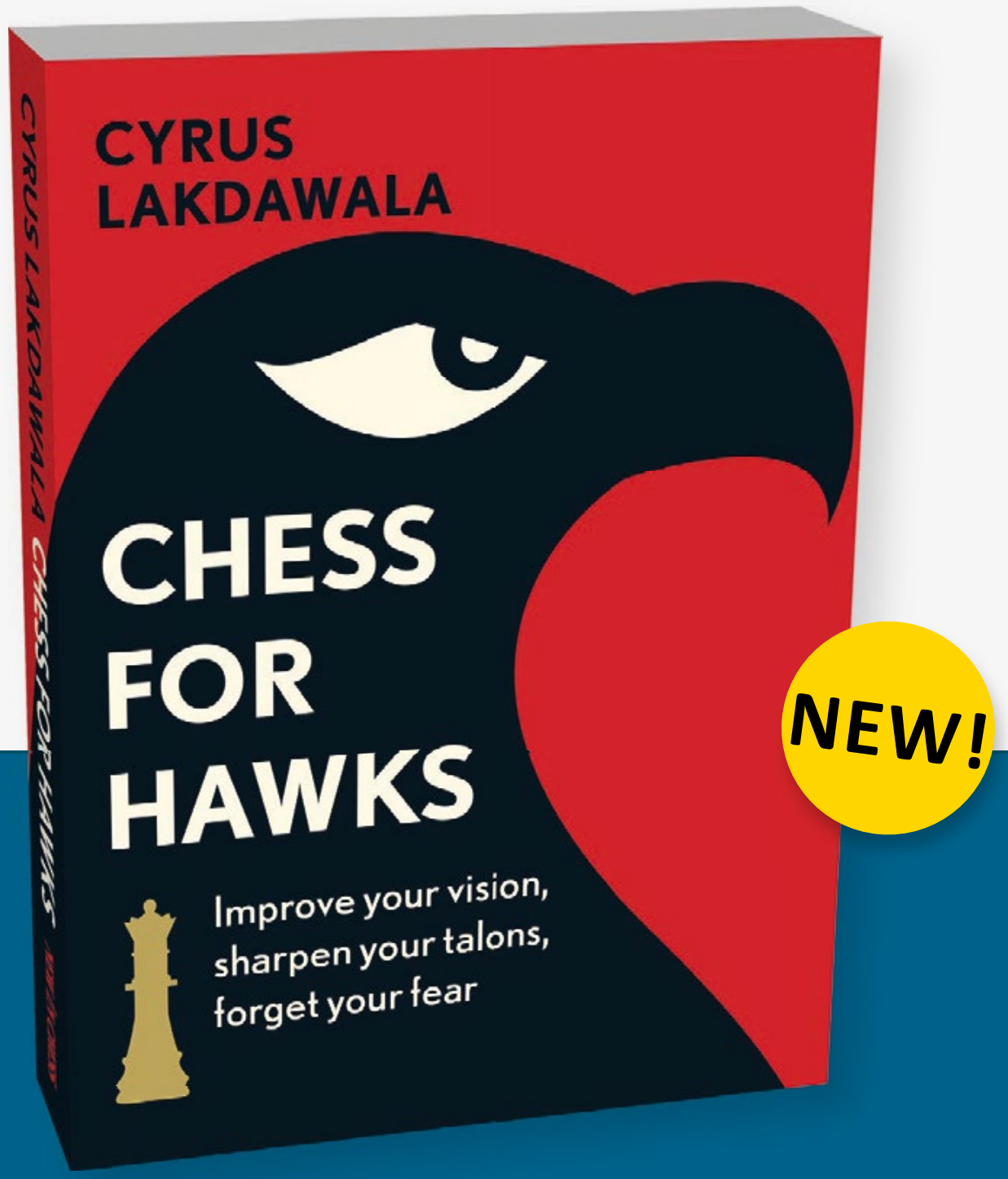
**If you could change one thing in the chess world, what would it be?**
Have more tournaments where the top players don't just play amongst themselves. It's more fun to see a mixed field.

**What does it mean to be a chess player?**
To create something new, to fight.

**Is a knowledge of chess useful in everyday life?**
The competitive part of any sport makes you stronger, especially mentally.

**What is the best thing that was ever said about chess?**
'That's what chess is all about. One day you give your opponent a lesson, the next day he gives you one.' – Bobby Fischer.

# How good are you at refusing a draw offer?

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